

***Seek First
the
Kingdom***

***An adult study class in
how to walk by the
leading of the Holy Spirit
of Jesus Christ the King***

REDEMPTION  PRESS

Copyright © 1998 by Paul A. Lindberg. Edit version 2/26/2019.

All rights reserved except as noted below.

Any person who truly considers him or herself to be a Christian in heart and who at least **wants** to ‘Seek First the Kingdom’ of God, hereby has my permission to copy any or all of this book and to distribute it as desired, provided that no monetary profit is realized on the copying or distribution.

Published by Redemption Press, PO Box 427. Enumclaw, WA 98022
Toll Free (844) 2REDEEM (273-3336)

Redemption Press is honored to present this title in partnership with the author. The views expressed or implied in this work are those of the author. Redemption Press provides our imprint seal representing design excellence, creative content, and high quality production. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any way by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise – without the prior permission of the copyright holder, except as provided by USA copyright law.

Unless noted as KJV, Scripture quotations are taken from (or modified from) the *New American Standard Bible* © Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

The version I use was printed in 1971 by Regal Books
a division of Gospel Light Publications, Glendale CA.

Where I did modify the Bible text, I was guided by *The Interlinear Hebrew / Greek English Bible*, Copyright © 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, and 1983 by Jay P. Green, Sr. and published in 1976 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. (Peabody, Massachusetts, 01960), and the Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc (Lafayette, IN 47903), edited by Jay P. Green, Sr. The version I have was printed in 1984.

ISBN 13: 978-1-68314-189-1 (Print)

ISBN 13: 978-1-68314-190-7 (ePub)

ISBN 13: 978-1-68314-191-4 (Mobi)

Library of Congress Card Catalogue Number – 2018954420

Table of Contents

Seek First the Kingdom

Preface.....	--
Seek First the Kingdom	1
Who Is the King? How Long Will He Reign?	9
What and Where Is the Kingdom?	12
Definitions	16
The Communicating God	25
The Kingdom Within	35
Faith Versus Works in the Kingdom	42
The Promise of God	47
The Kingdom Is a Party!	52
The Repentant Saint	65
Possessing the Kingdom	69
Suffering in the Kingdom	76
God's Plan of the Ages	81
He Is Able!	95

Psalm 23	99
Kingdom Principles	104
Women in the Kingdom	112
Growing in the Kingdom	121
The Evil One	126
Ten Commandments in the Kingdom	131
The Sabbath Rest	141
The Kingdom Without	158
Conclusions	162
Names of God	Appendix 1
Kingdom Class Quiz	Appendix 2

Preface ~ *Seek First the Kingdom*

This is a Bible study for Christians. If you are not yet a Christian, it probably won't interest you – unless God is already tugging at your heart to become one! And that is the whole idea here. I start with the premise that God is exactly who He says He is, that the Bible is His written Word, and that His Holy Spirit really does tug at our hearts to make His Word come alive to us. In the process, He reveals to us His nature and character, His great love for each of us, and His desire to lift us up into all that He planned when He made us.

That has been a stale theological theory for far too long. Now it is high time for it to become a reality in our lives. I believe the time is shorter than we think. The end of the age is upon us, and it won't be long before the seventh angel will sound his trumpet and the kingdoms of this world will become “the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ [Messiah], and He will reign forever and ever.” (Rev. 11:15) Will we be ready? I believe we will, for He will see to it. Perhaps He may even use this study to help us get ready.

I love God's Holy Word, and I have quoted from it extensively in this study. If you love the Kingdom of God, I believe you love His Word too, and while I don't ask that you take the time to check all the references and read the context for every quote (though that would be great if you had the time), I do suggest that if you read anything at all in this little book, you at least read the Scriptures that I've quoted, along with the prayer that the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ, the living Word, will guide your understanding of them and open up your vision to whatever He would like to teach you.

Even if you don't care to read my (often too verbose) comments, God's Word speaks for itself (Himself). The holy Scriptures are my starting point, my foundation, and the heart of this study course. The Scriptures (as illumined by the Holy Spirit) provide everything we need to enter and grow in the Kingdom. Saturate yourself with the Word of God! Feast on it and allow it to feed your spirit; meditate on it; love it; hide it in your heart as pure gold; dig in it as for treasure; wrestle with God for it, and don't let Him go until He blesses you in it.

I will be saying some rather shocking things to you during the course of this study – shocking only because we church-goers have too often accepted traditional doctrines without taking the time to really check them against the holy Scriptures. I know; I was raised in traditional church systems, and I used to believe all those old doctrines too. Now my constant query is, “What does the Bible really say about that?” All too often, I find that the Protestant Reformation didn't go far enough. We still accept too many doctrines from the Dark Ages of the old Roman Catholic church, created back when their goal was to prevent people from finding God, even at the cost of banning the Scriptures from the common people and torturing and killing those ‘heretics’ who wouldn't submit to the ‘infallible’ edicts of the pope.

However, don't believe me! I am just a fallible man, and I certainly don't want to become another pope! Rather, listen to what I say, study the Scriptures I quote, and ask the Holy Spirit what He thinks about all this. Commit it to Him, then trust Him to guide you into the truth, for He is the Truth who gives Life to His Word. I believe He will confirm to your heart what is right and give you the grace to just forget the rest.

Seek First the Kingdom

Along with some important exhortations not to be anxious, Matthew 6 contains what I believe is the most important command in all of Scripture. It is stated in two places (vs 10 and 33) and in four different ways.

To paraphrase a bit:

1. Our Father who is in heaven... Let your Kingdom come!
2. Let Your will be done perfectly on earth as it is in heaven!
3. Seek first His Kingdom... and all these things will be added to you.
4. Seek first His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Now just to be sure no one misses it, let's go over them again and paraphrase a little more:

1. Our Father whose Kingdom is already fully manifest in heaven... Let your Kingdom likewise be fully manifest here on the earth.
2. Let Your will be done down here on earth among us, in us, and through us, as perfectly as it is done in heaven.
3. Our highest priority is His Kingdom. As He rules as King within us, He takes care of all our earthly needs.
4. Our equally highest priority is also His righteousness: as we learn to do, day by day, minute by minute, whatever He shows us is right (His righteousness), then His Kingdom has come in our hearts, and we are assured that He takes care of all our earthly needs.

Each of these is saying the same thing, though in different ways. I believe this is the most significant concept ever presented by God to man. This is the heart of the gospel, the focus of Scripture, the main thrust of Jesus' ministry while He was a man on earth, God's Plan of the Ages, the fulfillment of every promise from God, the very purpose indeed for which man was created, and the heart cry of God Himself.

“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” It is absolute folly to look at this, the greatest of all prayers, in a casual way, as at a child's prayer, with cool, sleepy detachment, and pray it by rote or habit. This Kingdom for which we pray is not some antiquated Jewish dream, dusty with the history of centuries. Nor is it some future promised glory, lying in some nebulous, ethereal place beyond the grave, by which hope we soothe the pains of death. It is an immediate and vital personal concern.

For us who are “born of water and the Spirit” (Jn. 3:5), entering the Kingdom of Heaven must become a passionate necessity, for it is our very life. It is the heart of God's Plan of the Ages, His purpose for time, His strategy for redeeming us from ourselves and the vanity of the flesh and the world, and transforming our natures into conformance with His beloved Son. It is His means of making us one with Him, as in our Savior's fervent prayer, “... that they may be one, just as We are one.” (Jn. 17:22)

When we pray for His Kingdom to come, we are not praying for the advent of some worldwide political or economic program. We are not praying for the end of the world or the age, or the rapture, or the millennium, or for blessings upon the state of Israel, or even the restoration of the United States to its original biblically based roots.

Don't get me wrong here; I'm not knocking those kinds of prayers. I pray them myself.

But this is far more personal than that. "...the Kingdom of God is within you." (Lk. 17:21) This is a prayer that storms the gates of my own little kingdom and breaks down the barriers between God's will and my own self-centered will. It brings the rule of the Holy Spirit of God into my heart, mind, and body until the glory of God arises upon me and is seen through me, blessing and transforming me into His image.

Adam and Eve were created sinless and perfect, but immature. God's revealed will was for them to populate the earth and rule over it – frankly an impossible task for two so inexperienced and naïve. Yet Adam and Eve actually could have done it – on one condition and one condition only: if they had sought first His Kingdom and allowed Him to rule through them, directing them step by step, minute by minute, giving them ever-growing wisdom, keeping them from error and temptation – then He through them would have fulfilled His original command, and in the process, they would have “grown up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,” (Eph. 4:15) and never had to sin to do it!

I said that was God's revealed will. However, I believe that His perfect will was something higher and better. He allowed Satan to introduce sin into the world.

I know that doesn't sound higher and better, but it is. Consider a junior mountain climber. Does the experienced mountaineer just drag him up to the top to enjoy the view? No! He makes him struggle for it! How else will he ever learn? In the same way, God could have simply imprinted Adam and Eve with the wisdom, knowledge, and maturity they needed to fulfill His commission, and made them into instant king and queen for Him. But no. He wanted them to struggle for it.

How else will we ever learn?! It is only in the struggle that we come to know and appreciate His infinite self-giving love, mercy, grace, holiness, wrath against sin, and so on.

God doesn't want robots, machines, serving Him. God is love. True love will never coerce the beloved into loving in return. True love's greatest joy is the free choice of the beloved to truly love Him in return. But to allow that freewill choice, He also had to grant mankind the freedom to choose to love and serve another: self, through the deceptions of the tempter.

So here we are, several hundred generations from Adam, and we still struggle with the same temptations inspired by the same tempter.

"Did God really say...? That couldn't be true. You know better than that! You've gotta trust the good mind God gave you. Trust your own eyes, your own desires. Make your own choice. Do your own thing. You can be as God!"

And God simply responds, "Seek first My Kingdom."

"I know what's wrong, God. You're too far away. You're way up in heaven, in the Spirit realm. I can't perceive or understand that. I'm just muddling around down here in the physical realm doin' the best I can. Gimme a break! You're too big! I'm too small! After all, I'm just a sinner, saved by grace."

God repeats, "Seek first My Kingdom."

"You couldn't have meant for me to seek your Kingdom right now, Lord! Why, everyone knows that'll never happen 'til Jesus returns for His Bride! But if I just hang in 'til the rapture, then glory! Instant holiness, instant Kingdom, instant perfection. Wow."

God says, "Seek first My Kingdom. Seek it persistently. Seek it with all your heart."

“But I tried that, God. I tried for two years! And I got nothin’! There’s just got to be an easier way. Maybe if I’m real good, and more faithful to my church, and more generous in my tithe, and support our missionaries, I’ll be okay.”

And God smiles sadly and continues, “Seek first My Kingdom. Seek My Kingdom as your highest priority, and all these other things will take their proper place.”

Please understand that I’m not against going to church, or tithing, or supporting missionaries. There certainly is a measure of God’s blessing in each of those activities whether you’re walking in the Kingdom or not. The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18–20 and Mark 16:15–18 is still valid.

All I am saying here is that the Christian has a higher call: the call into the Kingdom.

Romans 8:1–11 makes it clear that there really are only two kinds of people: those who walk according to the flesh – those who cannot please God because their mind set on the flesh is hostile towards God – and those who walk not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, because the Spirit of God dwells in them. “... If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.” (vs 9) I must conclude that without exception, every Christian has God’s Spirit within.

Yeah, right. So why then does the apostle go on to exhort the brethren to not live according to the flesh, but rather to put to death the deeds of the flesh and be led by the Spirit of God? (vs 12–14) Could it be that a Christian who, according to God’s Word, is indwelt with God’s Spirit, may still be unable (or unwilling) to hear or be led by the Spirit within Him?

Unfortunately, it could be exactly that. Look at Galatians 2:15 – 5:25. That’s a big passage, I know, so I’ll condense and paraphrase it for you here:

“Forget about trying to be justified by the works of the law. It doesn’t happen. Never did, never will. The law was just our tutor to lead us to Christ. Faith in Christ set us free from the law. By faith I reckon myself dead to the law and crucified with Christ, so that the life I now live in the flesh is not really my life, but the life of Christ in me. Talk about God’s grace!

“So, all you foolish Galatians, who in heaven’s name has bewitched you into thinking you can complete by your fleshly efforts that which God began by His Spirit? Do you think you can be justified in Christ while still wallowing in your sins? Is Christ a minister of sin? God forbid!

“Sure, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, setting you free from slavery and making you a son and an heir. So how is it that you so quickly turn back to the weak and worthless worldly things and become enslaved all over again? Here you are, trying to force one another back under all the old Jewish laws, festivals, dietary restrictions, ceremonies, circumcision, Sabbath-keeping – you have fallen from grace!

“You are called to freedom, brethren! Just don’t turn your freedom into fleshly indulgence! Immorality, idolatry, strife, jealousy, anger, drunkenness, and wild carousings are all activities of the flesh. Those who practice them will never inherit the Kingdom of God. But that doesn’t mean you’re supposed to chastise those fleshly desires by the whip of the law! No! Walk by the Spirit, and you won’t carry out the desires of the flesh. As long as you are being led by the Spirit of God, you are not under the law. It’s really that simple!

“In fact, the fruits of the Spirit don’t have a single law against them! Think about that! No one can accuse you of wrongdoing when you bear the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control by the power of the Holy Spirit.

“Yes, dear Galatians, I know you belong to Christ Jesus and have life by His Spirit. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ, and are one in Him. I know it; you know it. Now I exhort you to prove it. Demonstrate it in your life by crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires, and walking by His Spirit within you.” (Gal. 2:15 – 5:25 paraphrased)

The Galatians were having the same problems we Christians face today. They were saved by faith, filled with God’s Spirit, and set free from the law’s bondage. Then they turned right around and tried to live according to human knowledge, abilities, and commandments instead of being led by God’s Spirit.

It’s easy to say that those who practice the deeds of the flesh will never inherit the Kingdom of God, while forgetting that the alternative – walking by the Spirit so you won’t get trapped into the deeds of the flesh – is not a trivial task.

Seek first the Kingdom! If it were trivial, we wouldn’t have to be commanded to persistently seek it. Don’t tell me, “I’m a Christian; I’m not under the law...” if you’re not being led by the Spirit! It is only those who are actively being led by the Spirit of God who are free from the law. (Gal. 5:18)

I discovered an interesting comparison between two parallel passages in the Gospels. Matthew 7:7–11 starts with the famous “Ask [persistently] and it shall be given you; seek [persistently] and you shall find; and knock [persistently] and it shall be opened to you,” and ends with “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!” The parallel passage in Luke 11:9–13 repeats all of that almost word for word, with one notable exception: “... give what is good...” in Matthew becomes “... give the Holy Spirit...” in Luke!

Could it be that all the good things we could ever ask, seek, and knock for are only found in the Holy Spirit? Could this also be presenting the same principle from Matthew 6:33, that if you seek first God's Kingdom, "all these other things will be added to you?" Can we, therefore, rephrase Luke 11:9: "Ask [for God's Kingdom to come] and it shall be given you; seek [for the leading of His Holy Spirit] and you shall find it; and knock [on the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven] and they shall be opened!"

I believe it means exactly that.

Look at the context. Both the Matthew and Luke passages come in the same sermon shortly following the Lord's Prayer, in which he taught us to pray "Thy Kingdom come..." The Matthew passage also adds, "Seek first the Kingdom..." (6:33) In Luke, the sermon is followed (vs 14–20) by Jesus casting out a dumb demon, concluding that "...if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you." It is clear from the context that the coming of the Kingdom was very much on Jesus' mind when he taught us to, "Ask... seek... and knock."

In fact, the Kingdom seems to be very much on Jesus' mind throughout the Gospels. He often talks about *the children of the Kingdom*; *the gospel of the Kingdom*; *the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father*; *the Kingdom of Heaven is like...*; *inherit the Kingdom prepared for you*; *until we drink it new in the Father's Kingdom*; *repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*; *the Father's desire is to give you the Kingdom*; *the Kingdom of God is come unto you*; *preach, saying the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*; *the Kingdom of God is within you*; *you are not far from the Kingdom of God*; *to you it is granted to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven*; *yours is the Kingdom of God*; *he that is least in the Kingdom of God is greater*

than he; I must preach the Kingdom of God; He sent them to proclaim the Kingdom of God; unless you become as children, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven; theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven; whoever humbles himself as a child is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven; some standing here who will not see death until they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom; My Kingdom is not of this world; it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God; this good news of the Kingdom must be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.

I could continue, but you get the point. Just skimming it quickly I found over sixty passages in the four Gospels dealing with the Kingdom. That subject clearly formed a large part of Jesus' attention and teaching during the years of His ministry. Perhaps it is worth our investigation more in depth.

Who Is the King? How Long Will He Reign?

Let's first look at the terminology. In the Scriptures, the "Kingdom of Heaven" is also called, "Kingdom of God," "Kingdom of the Father," "Thy [the Father's] Kingdom," "His [the Son of Man's] Kingdom," and "the Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." What's the difference, if any? And whose Kingdom is it anyway, the Son's or the Father's?

Both the Son and the Father are 100% God. So it is simply a matter of perspective. The Kingdom is both the perfect rule of Father God right now, sovereign throughout the universe (Kingdom of God), and the rule of King Jesus growing in the hearts of all who diligently seek Him (Kingdom of Heaven). It is the rule of our Father God who sends forth the Holy Spirit of His Son Jesus to rule in our hearts. In other words, the Father rules through the Son by the Holy Spirit. (Col. 1:12–27)

In some places when one Gospel speaks of the “Kingdom of God,” the parallel passage in another Gospel uses identical terminology except changing it to “Kingdom of Heaven.” (For examples see Matt. 13:24 – Mk. 4:26; and Matt. 13:31 – Mk. 4:30 – Lk. 13:18.) So from our earth-bound perspective, these terms are identical and can be used interchangeably.

The only distinction I see, and it is slight, is that the Kingdom of God the Father is complete and perfect, just as the Father is perfect and unchangeable in His eternity. But during time, which God created for change and growth, the Kingdom where King Jesus reigns is always growing.

It is all the same Kingdom. It is perfect and complete, fully manifest throughout all creation – from God the Father’s eternity perspective. Yet we time-dwellers do not see it so as we struggle to enter in.

From our time perspective, “There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore.” (Isa. 9:7) Yet from an eternal perspective, Jesus prayed to the Father, “... Thine is [right now] the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.” (Matt. 6:13)

Jesus sometimes made this distinction when He urged us to “Seek first His [God the Father’s perfect, complete] Kingdom...” (Matt. 6:33) yet also said that the (growing within time) Kingdom of Heaven is like the sower and the seed, or like wheat and tares, or like a tiny mustard seed, or like leaven growing slowly, silently within.

But as I said, this distinction is slight and not always used. Jesus also told us that, “... the [perfect, complete in eternity] Kingdom of God is [growing in time] within you.” (Lk. 17:21)

The only time this distinction becomes important is when we try to look beyond our bubble of time into eternity. Jesus' Kingdom will end – when all things are subject to Him and He abolishes all rule, authority, and power on earth and delivers up the Kingdom to the Father, “that God may be all in all.” (1 Cor. 15:24–28) Does that mean the Kingdom of God ends? No, of course not. Never. That is speaking of the end of time as we know it. The (growing) Kingdom of Jesus has reached its conclusion because every enemy (including death) is finally brought fully into subjection, and all the universe is in perfect harmony in the (perfect, eternal) Kingdom of God.

Our problem (as I see it) is our inability to understand the nature of eternity. We think of eternity as ‘forever and ever.’ But that’s not eternity. Eternity is always right now, for it is timeless. So whenever we say, “God’s Kingdom is forever,” we are really talking about “... the eternal [throughout all time] Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:11) That is not timeless. That is ever growing and increasing, all throughout the ages of time. “...the God of heaven will set up a Kingdom which shall never be destroyed... but it itself will itself endure forever.” (Dan. 2:44) “He [Jesus] will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His Kingdom will have no end.” (Lk. 1:33) King Jesus reigns supreme as “the name above every name, before whom every knee must [eventually] bow.” (Isa. 45:23; Phil. 2:9–11) At the end of this age of sin, “The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever.” (Rev. 11:15) Confused? Don’t fret. Here is the bottom line.

Now we see Jesus as the King of the Kingdom of Heaven. The eternal Father will continue to reign through King Jesus as His Kingdom slowly increases to encompass everything and everyone. At that point, all our ‘Kingdom’ terms become identical, as God the Father is then “all in all.” (1 Cor. 15:28)

What and Where Is the Kingdom?

“For thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy, ‘I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite. For I will not contend forever, neither will I always be angry; for the spirit would grow faint before Me, and the breath of those whom I have made.’” (Isa. 57:15–16)

There is room for some confusion here. Scripturally, the Kingdom seems to be two rather different things in two rather different places.

The most obvious of the two is this: in love, Father God through His Son Jesus rules throughout all time as absolute sovereign in a spiritual place called heaven, where He is and always has been King of kings and Lord of lords and where everyone and everything is in willing submission to His authority. He has invited us to come join Him there, and to enjoy His most perfect of all possible places throughout all the ages. The only conditions He places on us are (from Romans 10:9–10): we must believe Him enough to accept that His death paid the penalty for our sins and His resurrection guaranteed eternal life for us in Him, and we must love Him enough to confess before others His Lordship in our lives, which I believe includes allowing Him to rule in our lives so that His nature and character shine through us to them.

So far so good. Most Christians have no trouble with that definition of the Kingdom. But I have a few problems with it. First, what does it mean for Jesus to rule in us so that His nature and character shine through us? I mean, it’s pretty obvious that as long as this old flesh nature is so strong within us, His rule (i.e., His Kingdom) will be sporadic and tarnished at best. And second, it puts the burden on us now, but it puts

the rewards in the future. It implies that His Kingdom doesn't really come until we 'get to heaven someday' (whatever that means). Why then are we urged to pray for His Kingdom to come (and His will to be done) here on earth as it is in heaven?

That brings us to the second definition of the Kingdom: God rules right now by His Holy Spirit in His temple, which we are. "Don't you know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are." (1 Cor. 3:16–17) "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Cor. 6:19–20) "... For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said: 'I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.'" (2 Cor. 6:16) "... you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building... is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." (Eph. 2:19–22)

As a working definition of the Kingdom, this also seems to have problems. It's a great theory, very scriptural and all. But frankly, from what I've seen in my own life and others around me (other than perhaps a few amazing missionary books I've read), it just doesn't happen. It's fun to talk about. It makes for great Sunday-school teaching and polite conversation among us Christians. But if it doesn't work in my own life and in the lives of my family and loved ones, then that's all it is: a great theory. So we end up falling back on the first definition and cooling our heels until we 'get to heaven someday.'

And there, I believe, is where we miss it; and in the process, we also miss God's Plan of the Ages, His highest and best, His goal and desire for each of us, the very reason we were created and the purpose of our existence, the emphasis of the Scriptures, and the ultimate destination toward which the Great Shepherd is leading His flock.

As I said before, God's command is to "Seek first the Kingdom." If it were trivial, He wouldn't have commanded us to ask, seek, and knock persistently for it. Don't expect to receive the fullness of the Kingdom the very first time you say, "Father may I." Believe me, if you did, you would not be able to hold it all anyway.

In fact, God only knows how much we need to grow to receive the fullness of the Kingdom, and (get this; it's a key) God uses that earnest, persistent seeking and all the trials, disappointments, and suffering along the way to grow us to where we are able to receive the fullness of the Kingdom.

Allow me to use myself as an example. I have earnestly, prayerfully sought for the Kingdom to come in my heart and life for about forty years. Though I have had many successes, I have also had many failures, and in fact, here I am, forty years later, still battling with (and sometimes losing to) that same old flesh nature – pride, self-centeredness, laziness, gluttony, insufficient love, lack of self-control (especially of my sharp tongue), lusts of the flesh, bitterness, anger, avarice, and on and on. I would be lying if I didn't admit that right up front.

So where has that forty years of seeking for the Kingdom gotten me? Well, for one thing, I am learning to recognize and really hate those aspects of the flesh nature that I have found in myself – hate them so much that they don't do nearly as much damage as they used to, and they generally don't have dominion over me for very long at a time.

Second, I am learning to love the aspects of the Kingdom that replace them, especially the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control listed in Galatians as fruits of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22–23)

Third, I am becoming more aware of the presence of the Lord Jesus by His Holy Spirit in my life, to the point where I regularly (though not as much as I should) pray and seek for His leading, His wisdom, and His peace before I act.

Fourth, my faith is greatly strengthened. I really do trust Him to hear and answer my prayer (in His time and way). I really do love His wisdom, His ways, His choices for me. And I really am content with who He has made me, where He has put me, what He has given me, and what He wants of me.

Fifth, I'm actually finding myself being led by the Holy Spirit rather often now, both in speech and action, at times in ways that, humanly speaking, I would have no way of knowing in advance. There have been times where the Holy Spirit was free to say things through me that I did not know, and times when He led me to do things that were blessed far beyond my human abilities. These times are still too rare, but they are undeniably there, and I am encouraged.

Sixth, I find that worship is no longer a duty. It is a continual delight, and my greatest joy is to worship Him by being what He made me to be, doing what He made me to do, and glorifying Him by giving Him thanksgiving and praise.

Seventh, here I am, writing this and teaching others. Amazing. Though still growing, seeking, struggling, learning, failing, and crying out for help, I am able by the grace of God to help others. This, too, is in accordance with His plan. As I help, teach, encourage, exhort, or reprove others, I myself am also taught, encouraged, exhorted, and reprovved. Praise God!

So – what and where is the Kingdom? It is the sovereign rule of King Jesus within my heart to the point where I am led by His Holy Spirit in my thoughts, words, and actions. How does it work, and what is it like? It grows like a tiny seed, forcing its way up through the hard, rocky soil of my heart, growing bigger and stronger as the Master Gardener waters, cultivates, and fertilizes it until it becomes a beautiful, fruitful tree for the comfort and encouragement of all those around.

Definitions

Let's pause for some other definitions. Bear in mind that the Kingdom is a new realm: principles, laws, definitions – many things are likely to change when you enter a new realm.

One example is the speed of sound. Men used to think we could never exceed the speed of sound. Now we do, routinely, but the first time was not easy. When early aircraft attempted to break the sound barrier, they went into severe vibrations and oscillations, broke up, and crashed. Not until Chuck Yeager pushed the Bell-X1 beyond the sound barrier in 1947 did they discover why. The laws of physics change beyond the sound barrier! Standard laws of aerodynamics – air pressure and lift, turbulence, vortexes, streamlining, and so on – no longer apply above the speed of sound; you have to learn a whole new set of laws to function effectively in that realm.

A second example that comes to mind is the speed of light, which most people today still believe cannot be exceeded. That does not make sense to me. Why would almighty God create a realm for which even He could never reach the edges? The farthest galaxy is supposedly 13 billion light years away!

Okay, grant that God can travel to the farthest reaches of the universe in a moment. He's infinite. What about us?

Two Scriptures come to mind: John 6:21, in which Jesus was walking on the water, but when the scared disciples finally let Him into the boat, “immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going”, and Acts 8:39, in which the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away from the Ethiopian eunuch on the desert road to Gaza, and Philip immediately found himself at Azotus. In both passages, I believe that their travel was instantaneous. They exceeded the speed of light because they entered a different realm, the realm of spirit. In that realm, I believe the angels and demons routinely exceed the speed of light, impossible though it may be in our realm.

It’s similar in the Kingdom. The laws are all different; even basic principles change and sometimes seem to contradict what we know in the worldly realm. To get, you give; to rule, you become a bondservant; to be rich, you become poor; to be esteemed, you humble yourself; to be greatest of all, you become servant of all; to have power with God and men, you become submissive and obedient; to save your life, you lose it; and it is the meek who inherit the earth. “A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Cor. 2:14) The Bible was given to point us toward this spirit realm. We cannot understand it without the Holy Spirit’s guidance. With that in mind, let’s look at a few basic definitions.

Heaven: The Father’s dwelling place in eternity, where we someday will go to live eternally with Him. Right? Absolutely. But in the Kingdom, we live within time. In eternity, all rule and authority is abolished and the Kingdom is delivered up to the Father. God is all and in all. (1 Cor. 15:24–28) But in time, heaven, God’s dwelling place, is the temple of our hearts. We are in heaven as we dwell in the secret place of the Most High and abide under the shadow of the Almighty. (Ps. 91:1)

That is why we can pray to “Our Father who is in heaven...” as to the God who is personal, immanent, our Friend and Guide and Comforter, dwelling within us right now by His Holy Spirit. When we dwell in Him and He in us, we are in heaven right now. We don’t have to wait ’til we die.

It is just like in the previous section where I define the Kingdom in terms of the present rather than the future. I don’t deny the future aspects of our promised eternal Sabbath Rest. Not at all! I simply say that there is an aspect that is present, personal, and important for us right here and now, and if we miss it, we are in danger of missing the Kingdom altogether.

Eternal Life: Again, the obvious definition is to spend all of forever living with our God and Savior. “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them: and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand.” (Jn. 10:27–28) “Jesus said, ‘Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in this present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions, and in the age to come [the future], eternal life.’” (Mk. 10:29–30) Pretty straightforward. Believe it and be grateful. “Instruct those who are rich in this present world... to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may [in the future] take hold of eternal life.” (1 Tim. 6:17–19) “...that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:7) All very scriptural and theologically sound. But it reminds me of the starving Russian who rejected Christianity because, “All they promise is pie in the sky by and by. I want some here on my plate right now!”

In truth, eternal life is all that and much, much more! “This is eternal life, that they may know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.” (Jn. 17:3) “And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life [right now]; he who does not have the Son does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have [now, present tense] eternal life.” (1 Jn. 5: 11–13)

“What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life – and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested to us – what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and... with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” (1 Jn. 1:1–3) “Jesus said to him, ‘I am [now] the Way, and the Truth, and the [eternal] Life...’” (Jn. 14:6)

“... I am come that they might have life, and might have it [now, in this life] more abundantly.” (Jn. 10:10) “And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and [this is] eternal life!” (1 Jn. 5:20)

Like our Kingdom definition of heaven, this Kingdom definition of eternal life is present, not future tense. It is the very life of Jesus Christ Himself, the author and source of life. To know Him intimately, to have Him living within our hearts by His Holy Spirit, is eternal life, and we don’t have to wait for the pie in the sky by and by. As I said, eternity is not ‘forever and ever.’ It is timeless, and it is always right now.

Know Thee / Him: This phrase, as it is used in John 17:3 and 1 John 5:20, clearly does not refer to a mere human knowledge or belief. The demons know about Jesus, believe that He is God, and tremble! (James 2:19) But that is not saving knowledge.

No, this Kingdom knowledge is akin to a young couple deeply in love; they have opened up their hearts to one another and they rest in the peace and joy and trust of knowing that they belong to each other, that they have committed their lives to one another, and that nothing can ever come between them. Knowing is caring, loving, giving, serving, and committing to each other. This Kingdom kind of knowing even involves submitting to one another and honoring and respecting each other. This knowing is such close oneness that God uses the sexual union as an illustration. “Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived...” (Gen. 4:1 KJV; see also Eph. 5:31 ff)

“By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, ‘I know Him.’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His Words, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this [the fact that we keep His commandments] we know that we are in Him.” (1 Jn. 2:3–5)

This brings up another use of the word ‘know’ which many of these verses also employ. It means: to be assured; to be absolutely certain about something.

In human terms, it simply means that you are confident of your facts. But in Kingdom terms, it goes much further than that. It is a faith thing. And this knowledge can really only come by the gift of faith from the Holy Spirit. “By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.” (1 Jn. 4:13)

“... You have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things... the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for any one to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. And now, little children, abide in Him, so that if He should appear, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that every one also who practices righteousness is born of Him.” (1 Jn. 2:20–29) That is a kind of knowing far beyond getting your factual ducks in line.

Sin: This should be easy. Sin is our inability to keep God’s righteous law, both by inheritance from Adam and in actual practice. “The deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envyings, drunkenness, carousings, and things like these, of which I forewarn you... that those who practice such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.” (Gal. 5:19–21) That sounds pretty complete – from our human perspective.

But what about the Kingdom? Romans 3:23 intrigues me. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” I believe that for the Christian, “have sinned” is left in the past tense under the cleansing blood of Jesus (per 1 Jn. 1:7, 9), but notice that “fall short of the glory of God” remains in the present tense. This could be a Kingdom definition of sin.

However, it is not that simple. Consider this terrifying concept: “We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God [Jesus] keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.” (1 Jn. 5:18) That’s not talking about merely falling short of the glory of God. That’s talking about walking in His perfection here and now, free from sin.

“And you know that He [Jesus] appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His [Christ’s] seed abides in him and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” (1 Jn. 3:5–9)

Ouch! Personal experience tells me that I’m in real trouble here. All these years of seeking God’s Kingdom, and I still fail Him all too regularly. I must conclude that we who seek first the Kingdom still have that sin nature in us, alive and kicking. We not only fall short of God’s glory, but sometimes we even fall to our own sin nature. When we do, we had better realize that we’re no longer walking in the Kingdom. We’ve dropped out of fellowship with Christ and are no longer ‘abiding in Him,’ as there can never be any sin in Him.

So what can we do? Praise God that His mercy never fails. The apostle Paul had the same problem. He tells us about it in Romans 7. “... Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord...” (Rom. 7:24–25) Like the apostle Paul, we confess it, correct it, put it behind us, and walk on with God.

But we still remember how short we fall of God’s glory. A true believer is always humbly aware of the awesome glory of God – against whose standard we always fall woefully short. No matter how hard we try, no matter how few sins we commit, we always fall short. No matter if I can jump twenty feet, or thirty feet, or even fifty feet, I still fall short of crossing the mile-wide chasm. There is no room for arrogance or pride!

Don't feel too bad about always falling short of God's glory. In the Kingdom, all things work together for good. God has got us covered: "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in [humble, unworthy] earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves... For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh... For momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." (2 Cor. 4:6-17)

You see, in the Kingdom, we are not the focus, but rather "Christ in you, the hope of glory!" (Col. 1:27) Knowing that we fall short puts our focus on Christ. "That I may know Him... I press on toward the goal for the prize of the high call of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:10-14)

Do you see how these Kingdom definitions all fit together? If we are walking in the Kingdom right now, we are dwelling in heaven with King Jesus and He with us by the power of His abundant eternal life in us. Therefore, even in our humble awareness of how far short we fall from His glory, His glory shines through us as we learn to know Him, love Him, and obey Him. Those around us who perhaps cannot see Jesus on their own, recognize Him in us, for they see His strength and glory and perfection, and His great victory over sin and death, even through our own weakness and struggles with sin.

God knew what He was doing when He allowed sin to enter His perfect world. If we had never tasted the tragedy, suffering, bondage, and despair of sin, never felt the hopelessness, never seen the terrible consequences, never heard the cries of the doomed and the damned, never known

firsthand how easy to slip and fall and how impossibly difficult to wash it all away and become perfect, never experienced the pain and borne the shame of guilt with no one else to blame, we could never know humility! Each one of us would be next in line to become another Lucifer, to go our own way in pride without God, thinking we were good enough, wise enough, and strong enough on our own.

It is in seeing the darkness that we appreciate the light. It is in experiencing the wickedness and its consequences that we appreciate the power and beauty of His righteousness. It is in feeling the bondage of sin that we appreciate the incredible freedom we have in Christ Jesus. It is in recognizing our own helplessness, hopelessness, and ugliness without Him that we can begin to understand the words ‘faith, hope, and love...’ It is only in our miraculous deliverance from our sin that we can really understand the awesome grace of God. Truly, he who has been forgiven much, loves much! (Lk. 7:47)

If David had not fought the lion and the bear and later suffered many things at the hands of wicked King Saul, he could not have become a man after God’s own heart, the sweet psalmist of Israel. If King Solomon had not fallen into sin with his many idolatrous wives, we would not have the book of Ecclesiastes. If Judah had not been exiled by the Babylonians, we would not have the incredible book of Daniel. If Peter had not looked down at the fearsome waves, he would not have humbly cried out, “Lord, save me!” (Matt. 14:30)

“... Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” (Rom. 5:20–6:2)

Sin had to reign in death first. Only when we recognize sin for what it is, can we receive God's grace and return His love, humbly realizing the preciousness of His goodness and mercy and the beauty of His righteousness. We would not treasure His gift of eternal life if we had never seen the horror of the only alternative: sin and death. We cannot value the glory of His Kingdom until we see how far short of His glory we fall.

Jesus is the King. There will be no one in His Kingdom who steals His glory. Yet He has chosen to rule through us, even to display His glory through us – those of us who humbly love and appreciate Him for who He is in us. Wow. Just think about it. “Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or imagine, according to the power that works within us, to Him be glory in the church [the ecclesia, the called-out ones, the saints], and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” (Eph. 3:20–21)

The Communicating God

Mohammed is dead. Confucius is dead. Buddha is dead. Joseph Smith is dead. Ellen G. White is dead. The popes are dying one by one. And if our faith is founded on any ODG (old dead guy), it's not much of a faith.

But, praise God, our faith is founded on Jesus, who died, then demonstrated His power over death by rising again! “Hence also He is able to save forever [lit: to the uttermost] those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” (Heb. 7:25)

Our Savior is alive! Don't just take that for granted. Think about it! Most religions have a book, a creed, doctrines, some old legends and traditions, and some dead saint or prophet to look to for inspiration and guidance, to point them to God.

But Christianity is different. We look to and worship a living Savior, and we have His firm promise that He is the one and only true pathway to God; He is the Door; He is the Way; He is the Truth; He is the Life; He is the Lord of lords and the King of kings; He is the Light of the World, taking us by the hand to lead us from the darkness of sin into the blessed light of God's righteousness and the glory of His presence.

If God never speaks to us except through the Bible (as most 'Christians' seem to believe) then forget it; He may as well be dead. We're no better off than any other religion depending on some dead saint or prophet and their dusty books, creeds, and doctrines.

But we have a living Savior, so there should be a difference. What is it? Our God talks with us! He walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the garden; He talked with Noah; with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; with Joseph; with David and Solomon; with Elijah and Elisha; with Samuel even when he was a young boy; with Gideon, Moses, Daniel, and many others throughout the Scriptures. He talked with all the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles and saints as they wrote the Scriptures. So why are we so quick to assume that He stopped talking when the book of Revelation was completed?

I have actually heard people claim that God's speaking to His people was very rare in Scripture, and now that the Bible is complete, there is no more need for Him to say anything to us since, "Everything we need to go to heaven is right there in the Bible." Well, sure, but that to me is like the stewardess asking, "Coffee, tea, wine, or soda pop?" I don't drink any of those! How 'bout an alternative for people who try to stay healthy? Similarly, how 'bout an alternative for Christians whose goal is higher than merely making it to heaven when they die?

What if our goal is to actually serve our Lord here on earth? Or more importantly, what if our goal is to learn to know God on an intimate, personal basis, so we can follow Him, become like Him, and love Him with “all our heart soul, mind, and strength,” like the Scriptures command? How do you love someone who never even talks to you?

This brings up a touchy point, as it implies that the Scriptures are incomplete. That is heresy for most Christians. It used to be heresy for me too! What God has given us so far in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments has always seemed complete for the age of sin. At the very least, we are prohibited from adding to (or taking away from) Scripture on our own. And the Scriptures certainly present a beautiful story of God’s historical dealings with mankind and a complete presentation of the gospel – mankind’s utter depravity and bondage to sin and the perfect salvation and freedom we have in Christ Jesus. So at least for this age, the Holy Bible may be complete.

But if this is true, how can I claim that our God is the communicating God? Isn’t everything He communicates automatically Scripture? When I say, “God told me such and such,” doesn’t that mean that we’d better write it down and paste it into our Bible right beside the apostle Paul’s writings?

That is a pretty good question. I believe the answer is no, the vast majority of His communication has not been, is not, and never will be Scripture. I believe that most of what God communicates is for a specific person, place, and time. In the past, God has said and done many things among His people that were not recorded and never became part of Scripture. “There are also many other things which Jesus did which if they were written in detail, I suppose the world itself could not contain the books which would be written.” (Jn. 21:25)

However, Scripture is uniquely inspired and divinely protected. It was written to speak to all people at all times. Scripture is the foundation on which everything else is built. No true saint or prophet of God today will dare to speak, “Thus saith the Lord!” and then equate what comes out with the Holy Scriptures! If someone tried that, you would know right of the bat that you had a false prophet on your hands.

But wait. A foundation is useless unless something is built on it! And who are we to tell the Creator what He can or can't do in the ages to come? To limit the infinite almighty God to just sixty-six books for all the ages of time seems to me a bit presumptuous. I know for sure (from Scripture itself) that God speaks to his people and that He never changes. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, yes and forever.” (Heb. 13:8) “Every good thing granted and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow.” (James 1:17) He may (or may not) inspire someone to write more Scripture for the ages to come – that is up to Him, and only He could pull it off anyway. But this I know without any doubt: God is a communicating God, and He loves to communicate with us who are walking with Him in the Kingdom.

I believe that God talks to us in many ways. Sometimes He speaks directly and verbally, whether audibly or inaudibly (though for me that is rare). At other times, He speaks through feelings or emotions, perhaps with a gentle nudge in our spirit or a subtle awareness pricking our conscience. Sometimes He speaks through circumstances or in specific answer to our prayer. Often He speaks through mental impressions, guiding our will, or giving us a peace or ‘knowing’ about something. And He quite frequently speaks by using the inspiration of the Holy Spirit through Scripture or through other writings, preaching, or exhortations from other saints.

This is not an all-inclusive list. God, being infinite, can communicate in any way He wants. He has spoken through rocks, through a spectacular sunset, through a mighty storm, in a still, small voice in the silence, through a bush set on fire with His glory, through the vast panoply of stars above, through a wrestling match with an angel, through a donkey, through a fiery furnace, through handwriting on the wall, and through a dastardly worm eating the stalk of a prized plant.

So, He speaks. The big question now is, how do we hear Him while guarding ourselves against just hearing voices in our head or following spirit guides to become another cult?

And learning that, my friend, is the subject of this whole book! That is learning to live in the Kingdom of God. That is learning to be led by the Holy Spirit. That is coming to know and follow the Good Shepherd's voice. That is walking by faith and not by sight. That is dwelling in the secret place of the Most High. That is seeking first His Kingdom and His righteousness. That is abiding in Christ as a branch in the vine. That is persistent seeking, asking, and knocking. That is waiting on the Lord, trusting that He will be to me, personally, all that He said He would be. "Rest in YHWH, and wait patiently [intently, earnestly, longingly] for Him..." (Ps. 37:7)

Waiting on the Lord is nearly a lost art in our instant gratification culture. It seems that we have redefined prayer to be merely giving God our list of needs and desires and explaining to Him how we think He ought to run His world.

I believe that effective fervent prayer, the "pray without ceasing" kind of prayer (1 Thess. 5:17) is primarily listening to and waiting on God, secondly our response of love, worship, gratefulness, and commitment, and thirdly obedience to His will, reflecting His glory to the world. Then (maybe seventh or eighth) comes telling Him our own needs and petitions.

Yet how much time do we really spend just listening for His still, small voice? What would you think of a fellow who visited the president of the United States but spent his entire visit talking and never allowed the president to get a word in edgewise? And our God is far greater than any president!

Besides, He already knows our needs and our wish list. Don't you think our prayer time would be more profitable if we spent a little less time telling God what He already knows and more time waiting on Him to discover what we so desperately need to know?! Don't you think our prayers would be more effective if we could first tune into His heart to find out His will and His plans and purposes for us, rather than twisting His arm to bless our own plans and desires?

It is true that many who have started out trying to follow the Holy Spirit have fallen on the rocks of deception. I can't deny that, and humanly speaking, I would be lying if I told you that I didn't fear that. But I still believe (for I am a believer) that God is able to keep us from stumbling and to make us stand in the very presence of His glory blameless, with great joy. (Ref. Jude 24) If you are truly seeking for Him, you will find Him. "You will seek Me, and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." (Jer. 29:13) If you are trusting in Him, delighting in Him, resting in Him, committing your ways to Him, and waiting patiently for Him, you will not be put to shame (Ps. 25:3), for He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday. (Ps. 37:3-7)

However, in light of the increasing deceptions around us, I would like to offer a few suggestions to help guard us.

Most importantly, whatever the Lord seems to be saying to us, line it up with the foundation. We have the Bible, the written Word of God. If we make sure everything lines up foursquare with Scripture we can't go too far astray.

“Now these [the Bereans] were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the [spoken] word with great eagerness, examining the Scripture daily, to see whether these things were so.” (Acts 17:11) They used the Old Testament (which was all they had) to ‘prove’ the New Testament even as it was being written.

This is a basic principle that I cannot emphasize too much. Always build foursquare on the foundation that God has already given. Yes, our God is a communicating God, but He will not contradict Himself or deny His eternal Word.

For Moses, this foundation was the Pentateuch. He knew God had inspired him to write it, and he ordered, “You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of YHWH your God...” (Deut. 4:2) Moses probably thought the Bible was finished right there! But no. God kept right on communicating. King David surely knew that. The inspired Psalms just kept coming all his life. But near the end of King Solomon’s life, Agur the oracle may have thought God had completed His holy Word with the compilation of the Psalms and Proverbs. Agur wrote, “Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He reprove you and you be proved a liar.” (Prov. 30:5–6) But again, God just continued to communicate, now through the major and minor prophets, up through Malachi, who prophesied of the return of “Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.” (Mal. 4:5) Surely that would be God’s final communication. Ha! That was the beginning of God’s finest communication yet, as He sent His Son among men to teach them about Himself. So we get the four Gospels, built on the foundation of the entire Old Testament, then the Epistles, built on the foundation of the Gospels, and the Revelation of Jesus Christ, built on those.

So now Christian leaders, like many saints of the past, think that God is all done communicating. They 'close the canon' and stop listening for the still small voice of the Spirit. And God passes them by and calls out for Himself a many-membered Bride who "follow the Lamb wherever He goes" (Rev. 14:4), who overcome by "the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death" (Rev. 12:11), who are beheaded "because of [their] testimony of Jesus and because of the Word of God," and who therefore, "come to life and reign with Christ for a thousand years." (Rev. 20:4) Finally, they prophesy by the Spirit, "Come! Let everyone who hears say, 'Come!' Let the one who is thirsty come. Let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost." (Rev. 22:17)

Now, for all you doubters out there. Think hard and tell me again just when God stopped communicating. Wasn't it about the time the church stopped listening? About the time the church leaders started persecuting those of true faith, took away the Scriptures from the common people, and installed multiple levels of priests, cardinals, bishops, and the pope to keep people from knowing God for themselves? Yes, I think that was about it. The result was 1260 years of Dark Ages, until Martin Luther began listening to the Holy Spirit for himself and the Reformation emerged. And that was just the beginning! It was followed by wave after wave of revivals, Great Awakenings, and Pentecostal movements around the world. Religious leaders may not want to hear, but they cannot silence God. He will always find some who are willing to seek Him with a whole heart. "And you will seek Me and find Me, when you seek for Me with all your heart." (Jer. 29:13)

That's it. Those who don't want to hear from God, who are too busy building their own little kingdom, will not hear from Him. They've got God in their little 'Bible' box, and they are frankly a bit relieved that He stopped talking 2000 years ago.

But the children of the Kingdom, the true saints, the Bride of Christ, are not happy to just sit on their duffs and wait for the rapture. They will continue seeking Him with their whole hearts until they find Him, learn to know His voice, and walk with Him on into the fullness of His Kingdom.

However there are a lot of ‘voices’ out there, and only one of them is the Lord! In fact, Satan with his ‘angel of light’ costume has been practicing for 2000 years, trying to mimic the voice of our Savior. But though Satan may use Scripture, he will always pervert it, twist it slightly, so that it comes out a lie, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But God is truth, and His Word is truth. His guidance will harmonize with Scripture and do no violence to it. God is consistent with Himself, and He will not violate His own Word. The more we know and heed the Bible, the safer we are.

Remember that the Kingdom is following the King, not a man. Do not take anyone’s (including my) thoughts for your own. Instead, whatever you hear, take it before the Lord in prayer to see if He will confirm it to your heart and give you “the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension” (Phil. 4:7) about it. Run it past all you know of the Scriptures to see if there is any conflict. Wrestle with God over it, until His Spirit either confirms it to your heart, or shows you where the error is. Maybe He allowed you to hear a false doctrine just so you would wrestle with Him about it and really learn the truth from Him! Sometimes it takes a lie to shake us out of the fog of our complacency so we can discover the truth.

So now I can address the heresy I mentioned earlier: If God tells me something, should you write it down and paste it into your Bible? Of course not. Scripture is Truth, absolute, infallible, inerrant, perfect, and pure. “Every Word of God is tested [purified, tried and found perfect]...” (Prov. 30:5)

However, every human prophesy, interpretation, exhortation, and revelation is mixed: some of God (how much often depends on the godliness of the vessel), some of ourselves (and don't forget how deceitful and desperately wicked our own hearts can be), and some of Satan and his demons (who are whispering in our ears more often than we want to admit). "Moreover, they [the priests] shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean." (Ezek. 44:23) "And if you will extract the precious from the vile, you will become My spokesman..." (Jer. 15:19; See also Ezek. 22:26) God's true spokesmen practice holiness.

"Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature." (1 Cor. 14:20) God does not want us to blindly follow our human leaders; He wants us to learn to discern truth from error. Sometimes He will even allow a leader to preach an error to keep us on our toes, or to keep us from idolizing him. "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part." (1 Cor. 13:9)

Remember, we are a many-membered body. If it's a little thing, like what socks to wear, don't trouble other members of the body about it. But for important things, it may be wise to check with our God-given authorities and co-laborers – especially our spouses! Each person's perspective is a bit different, but God sees from all perspectives. If we want to see a situation as He does, it may help to confirm it with others.

I believe that a little time and carefulness, waiting on God, searching the Scriptures, seeking for the leading of the Holy Spirit within rather than just depending on the words of a person, and getting confirmation from godly brothers and sisters in Christ, will help us avoid falling into error as we learn to know the Good Shepherd's voice.

The Kingdom Within

“After being questioned by the Pharisees as to when the Kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, ‘The Kingdom of God is not coming with signs that can be seen; nor will they say, “Look, here it is!,” or “There it is!” For behold, the Kingdom of God is within you.’” (Lk. 17:20–21)

There once was a man who had the unique ability to touch and change men’s hearts. He spent much of his time visiting prisons, hospitals, taverns, and houses of ill-repute, and talking to the peasants and ruffians he found there.

A few rejected him, but the vast majority loved him and gladly received his message. It was awesome. Everywhere he went, people’s lives changed. They repented and stopped their drinking, carousing, and immorality. They learned to love and care for each other and to live honest, faithful lives.

In short, multitudes of people became good, responsible citizens of that little nation due to the ministry of this one man. The nation’s political and religious leaders soon heard of his ministry. They heard the testimony of those whose lives had been changed; they saw taverns, brothels, prisons, and hospitals being emptied, criminals restoring what they had taken and caring for those they had wronged, and dens of iniquity being turned into places of fellowship or worship.

So they found this man, honored him as a leading citizen, and fully supported him in his ministry. *Don’t you wish!*

In reality, the political / religious leaders hated Him, plotted against Him, lied about Him to the crowds, turned public opinion against Him, and crucified the very Lord of Glory, the King of the Universe. Why? How could they? How could anyone hate a man so good, so loving, so faithful and true, so perfect in all his ways?

The answer is rather easy. They wanted an external kingdom (with them ruling, of course), and He preached an internal Kingdom with almighty God Himself in control. These two kingdoms are not compatible. You cannot serve two masters, two opposing kings. The scribes and Pharisees correctly saw that the Kingdom preached by Jesus was a threat to their kingdom – an immense and mortal threat. They enslaved people by their unjust laws, deceit, and hypocrisy, while Jesus set them free by His truth and righteousness.

This aspect of the Kingdom of God is at the same time both very simple and very profound. For some reason, our human nature, having finally grasped it, just desperately wants to turn it into another set of external do's and don'ts, to define it to death, to codify it and put it in a box for use when needed, or to bottle it up and sell it like a tonic. It seems like every human relationship is unalterably dependent on conformance with our own particular set of standards of good and evil, right and wrong. We may have gotten rid of the Pharisees without, but we still haven't eliminated that sly old Pharisee hiding within.

R.C. Sproul (in his *Pleasing God* series) tells the story of a Christian college which maintained that, though it was okay for Christians to play the game of cards called Rook, Bridge was sinful and could not be tolerated among the faithful.

Dr. Sproul, being a tournament level duplicate Bridge player himself, had trouble with that. But I understand it perfectly. It was that Pharisee within again. The leaders of the college, having heard from God on the matter, had Him in their box, and anyone who refused to conform to their revelation was simply un-Christian.

Am I being too hard on that Christian college? Perhaps, especially in light of the fact that I do it too, and so do you!

There is not a one of us who, having learned some little aspect of the Kingdom of God within, doesn't try to impose it on those around us. For the most part, we're accustomed to it, so we tolerate it and even at times encourage it and go to one another to 'get the leading of the Lord.'

But wait! Is that really wrong? Aren't we supposed to submit ourselves one to another (Eph. 5:21) and exhort, teach, and reprove one another? (Titus 2:15) Yes, we are. Therein lies the profoundness of the concept of the Kingdom within. Everything that God gives us is both for our own growth and for helping, exhorting, teaching, and reproving others – but not for judging or condemning! It is a stream of living water flowing from the Lord; we neither bottle it up to stagnate, nor force it downstream in a flood. We just kindly, gently let it flow to whomever will receive.

“Do not pass judgment and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you shall not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned.” (Lk. 6:37) In the Kingdom, there is no condemnation. There can't be, because who am I to take my 'leading of the Lord' and insist that you follow me? The Lord may be leading you on a different path! “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.” (Rom. 8:1–2) May I rephrase that? There is no condemnation against those walking in the Kingdom by Jesus' Holy Spirit, because the laws in that realm are all laws of the Spirit of life: love, joy, peace, and so on, against which there is no law. (Gal. 5:22–23) All the negative laws, all the laws of condemnation, “Don't do this, don't do that,” exist only in a lower realm. The laws in that realm can only condemn, for the sinner can never keep them. But none of the laws of sin and death are in the realm of the Kingdom. They can't even exist in Christ, in whom there is no sin.

So I may be led by the Holy Spirit to come to you and exhort you, teach you, correct you, and even reprove you, but when I am done I cannot (in the Kingdom) condemn you or demand that you conform to my revelation for you.

All I can say is: “There you have it, my friend. That is what I believe the Lord gave me for you. Now I urge you to offer it up before the Lord in prayer. Whatever He confirms to your heart by His Holy Spirit in you will become a living part of you; whatever He does not confirm to you will be gone with the wind. In either case, I cannot hold you to it or judge you for it; only the Holy Spirit within you can make it live in your heart.”

It’s called freedom of conscience. “Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One man regards one day above another; another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. ... I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. ... The faith that you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.” (Rom. 14:4, 5, 14, 22, 23) “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.” (1 Cor. 6:12) “... All things are lawful, but not all things edify.” (1 Cor. 10:23) “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, namely ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Gal. 5:13–14) In these passages we see that there really are no do’s and don’ts for those who are led by the Holy Spirit, walking in the Kingdom.

We have to be a bit careful, here, though. Yes, all things are lawful, but not all things edify; not all things are profitable; we dare not let our freedom in Christ turn into an opportunity for the flesh, or let that deceitful sin-nature master us again. Yes, we are free from the old law of sin and death, but that freedom is only to be led by the Holy Spirit, by the law of life in Christ. None of the old laws apply, and we cannot use them to judge or condemn one another. But the law of life in Christ is still law. It is the law of love; the law of obedience, humility, and submission; the law of mercy, grace, and forgiveness; the law of truth and justice; the law of faithfulness, kindness, and goodness. It has to be, because it is the very nature and character of God's Holy Spirit working in and through us.

That is the Kingdom!

To walk in the Kingdom, I will walk by those laws of the Spirit of life because I love the King! To love Him is to obey Him. "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." (Jn. 14:15) "This I command you, that you love one another." (15:17) "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love is therefore the fulfillment of the law." (Rom. 13:10) "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments..." (1 Jn. 5:3) "The whole law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Gal. 5:14)

We must learn to be led by the Holy Spirit, but there are evil spirits out there too, all trying to appear to us as angels of light! This being 'led by the Spirit' could be a very tenuous, loosey-goosey, perilous thing, fraught with dangers of heresy and cultish behavior, were it not for the tests that God gives us in 1 Jn. 4: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, to see whether they are from God." (vs 1) John then lists five tests (4:2-4, 6, 7-12, 13-19, and 4:20 - 5:3), all inter-related, based on observing the fruits of the Spirit.

These five tests are important and really ought to be an entire book in themselves. But I'm going to go out on a limb here and try to summarize them for you, trusting that you will take my summary before the Holy Spirit and let Him write that book in your heart. Remember, these tests are based on observing the deeds that result from how you think the Holy Spirit is leading you. If it is really the Holy Spirit, He will lead you to do these five things. If it is another spirit, he will lead you to avoid them or even to do the opposite.

1. Confess to others that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came in the flesh as the Messiah to His people, 2000 years ago. Likewise confess to others that this same Jesus Christ, in the form of His Holy Spirit, is come into His people right now.

2. Hear and heed the Word of God as spoken by the prophets and saints of the holy Scriptures. You can usually tell the spirit of truth from the spirit of error by whether or not it lines up with the foundation of the Scriptures.

3. Confess not only that God is love, but also that He loves us individually, specifically, so much that He gave Himself to atone for our sins so He could have a relationship with each one of us. Therefore, we ought to love one another.

4. Confess not only that Jesus Christ was divine, but also that the Christ dwelling in us by His Holy Spirit is divine, truly the Son of God, God Himself dwelling in us and we in Him.

5. Result in deeds and expressions of love for each other.

These tests are a strong encouragement for us to not let our freedom in Christ turn into an opportunity for the flesh. If we cannot discern the spirits according to 1 John 4, we may well find that we are being led by an evil spirit, to our peril!

Herein lies the profound nature of this seemingly simple task of walking in the Kingdom by the Holy Spirit. Each one of us must learn to discern the voice of the Good Shepherd for himself. There is no alternative. On this alone we stand or fall.

Satan is right there in his ‘angel of light’ costume, eager to turn aside this new child of the Kingdom. Satan will succeed, if we are not diligent to “test the spirits...” by God’s Word.

The immature saint knows that, but what is his human tendency? To ask for help! “You yourself go near and hear all that YHWH our God says; then speak to us all that YHWH our God will speak to you, and we will hear and do it.” (Deut. 5:27) You go up the mountain for us, Moses. We can’t take the effort or the risk of hearing God for ourselves; we’ll just follow you.

And in following a man, even a very good man like Moses, they eventually lost the Kingdom altogether.

The Kingdom that Jesus preached, the Kingdom within, must be different. You cannot enter the Kingdom following a man! Moses was possibly the best man who ever lived. But even the best of Bible-based laws and guidelines of the best of men cannot be applied to someone else’s life to keep him on the King’s highway. Oh, we do apply God’s laws! But we apply them only to ourselves, never to another. When we take what God has revealed to us and try to enforce it upon our brother, we are no longer walking in the Kingdom, and indeed are in danger of building another kingdom of man in opposition to God’s Kingdom. There is but “one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” (1 Tim. 2:5)

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them upon their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not [need to] teach every one his fellow citizen and each his brother saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. And I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” (Heb. 8:10–12) That, my friend, is our ultimate goal.

Faith Versus Works in the Kingdom

“God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in Him.” (1 Jn. 4:16) Love is not just an aspect of His character, it is the very essence of His nature. We can only love because He first loved us. (vs 19) Everyone who truly loves is born of God and knows God (vs 7), and the one who does not love cannot know God. (vs 8) So far, so good.

But now John starts meddling. “If someone says ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.” (vs 20) “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep [do, obey, align our daily lives to] His commandments...” (5:2–3)

There is no question that our salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ alone, not of works, lest any should boast. (Eph. 2:9; Rom. 3:19–28) It has to be that way, because it is while we were dead in sin, unable to do any good works, that God quickened us by His Spirit, opened our spiritual eyes, planted faith in our hearts, and wooed us to Himself. But although a newly saved person is quickly given a love for God and His people, along with a love of what is right and a hatred of what is wicked, that doesn’t mean he has entered the Kingdom. We must enter the Kingdom through good works as well as faith.

Before you take me out and stone me, allow me a few paragraphs to defend myself. Aside from the obvious passage in James 2:14–26, talking about how a man is justified by works, not by faith alone, for faith without works is dead, let’s skim through Jesus’ teaching in Matthew (a very Kingdom-oriented book). “For I say to you, that unless your [deeds of] righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” (Matt. 5:20)

“Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.” (7:21) “...when the Son of Man comes in His glory... the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you invited Me in; naked and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me... Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it [any of the above good works] to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.” (25:31–40)

Almost the entire Sermon on the Mount, with its beautiful focus on the Kingdom, is talking about good works. “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness [i.e. for righteous deeds], for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” (5:10) “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” (5:16)

Jesus goes on to talk about overcoming anger, dealing with offenses, being faithful to your spouse, responses to our enemies, giving alms (with a warning to beware seeking the praise of men), forgiving others, praying, fasting, and so on. Notice how little of the Sermon on the Mount talks about faith, and how much talks about good works.

Yes, these good works have to be done with faith and love (right motivations). Just doing good works will never get you anywhere. “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many mighty works?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice iniquity.’” (7:22–23)

But it is by means of the good works, done in faith as unto the Lord Himself, that we enter the Kingdom. I'll say it even more boldly: Entering the Kingdom is learning to hear and obey the King – actually doing what He says – and if we are not growing in obedience, then neither are we growing in hearing. In the Kingdom, they must go together. Either we're hearing and obeying the King, or we're not really hearing Him at all.

We're back to Galatians 2–5: We live in Christ by faith, so now let us also walk in Him by His Spirit. “For if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body [replacing your wicked works with good works] you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God [in what they do each day], these are the Sons of God.” (Rom. 8:13–14)

That's the bottom line. I am not teaching a works salvation. We are saved by faith alone, and even that is not of ourselves but is a gift of God. (Eph. 2:8) But have you ever put verse 10 with that passage? Allow me to connect them. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Ouch!

But for those who seek first the Kingdom, it is not really surprising, for it is only Christ Jesus in us who is at work through us by His Holy Spirit. (Gal. 2:20) That distinction is slight, but important. It's a matter of focus. Whenever we start to focus on us doing good works for Him, it turns out sour, and we're liable to fall prey to pride. But doing the very same things under the very same leading of the Holy Spirit, except leaving the focus on Him doing His works in and through us, He gets the glory, and we simply walk on with God.

Even our best works are worthless in the Kingdom if they are self-led, self-motivated. In Matthew 7:23 (KJV) Jesus calls that iniquity. The only truly good works are those done under His Lordship. “Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes in Me [faith], the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do [through you], that the Father may be glorified in the [many-membered] Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. If you love me, you will keep [obey] My commandments [good works]. And I will ask the Father and He will give you another Helper [to help us do His works], that He may be with you forever, that is, the [Holy] Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him. But you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will see Me no more; but you will see Me; because I live [in you], you shall live also. In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” (Jn. 14:12–20)

It all boils down to this. “Dear Jesus, You saved me from sin and gave me life instead of the death I had earned. I owe my life to You, both because You made me and because You died for me. I receive Your salvation by the faith that You planted in my heart. Now I am Yours. I will love, honor, and serve You all my days. Please fill me now and lead me with your Holy Spirit. So, Lord... what would You have me to do right now?”

That, my friend, is the first step into the Kingdom. It is committing to God to put actions to my faith; to not just say I belong to Him, but to actually live like I belong to Him; to be led day by day, minute by minute, by His Holy Spirit in all I do; to be a faithful, willing, and obedient subject of the King. It starts with faith, believing that He is the King with all power and authority, but it ends with letting Him rule through us.

“... ‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.’” (Jn. 6:28–29) Our faith in Him and in all His promises delights Him the most – faith to believe that He is all He says He is and that He will do all He says He will do... and that He is doing it, through us, right now! “... Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” (Phil. 2:12–13)

“For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day [of the Lord] will show it, because it is revealed with fire; the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.” (1 Cor. 3:11–15)

“... His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature... applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral virtue... knowledge... self-control... endurance... godliness... brotherly kindness, and... Christian love. For if these qualities are yours and increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful... Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice [do] these things, you will never stumble. In this way the entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.” (2 Peter 1:3–11)

The Promise of God

Have you ever daydreamed about living at the time of Christ? I have! What a joy it would be to walk and talk with Him, to sit at His feet and learn of Him, to be able to go to Him anytime and ask Him about my problems and receive His encouragement or healing! Of course I'd never deny Him or fall away at the time of His suffering and death. No way! Wow. Just to see His face and know that His smile is for me...

It's a fun daydream, but Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment... I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear [endure] them now. But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth... and He will disclose to you what is to come." (Jn. 16:7-13)

Well, that's pretty clear. Jesus was not abandoning His disciples. He deliberately left in order to send them something even better than His physical presence. But it does raise some serious questions. Why could His disciples not bear all the things He wanted to tell them? Just who is this promised Helper who would "guide them into all truth," anyway, and why could He not come until Jesus went away, back to the heavenly Father? Let's skim the rest of the Gospel of John to see if we can find some clues:

"Jesus answered and said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.' ... Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If any man is thirsty, let him

come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. ‘... he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens: and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ...I am the Good Shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold [i.e., not Jews]; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock with one Shepherd... My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. ...I will ask the Father and He will give you another Helper [Comforter], that He may be with you forever, that is, the [Holy] Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He [now] abides with you [Jesus], and will be in you [His Spirit]. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will see Me no more; but you will see Me; because I live, you shall live also. In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you... Abide [dwell] in Me, and I in you... the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. Peace I leave with you: My peace I give to you... as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’ When He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” (Jn. 4:13–14; 7:37–39; 10:2–28; 14:16–27; 15:4; 20:21–22, excerpts)

This tells me that Jesus had to physically go away in order to release His own Spirit to dwell in our hearts, so that we would no longer look to any physical person as our guide, but rather to the Spirit of Jesus within us. The biggest clue is the phrase, "...the Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified." (Jn. 7:39) Note that the word 'given' is in italics, meaning it was not in the original. Literally, "...the Spirit was not yet [existing as a separate entity], because Jesus was not yet glorified [in His divine form]." The Spirit of Jesus was not available to the disciples because it was locked up within the physical body of Jesus until He ascended to heaven and was "glorified" – meaning, until He received back the 'divine form' that He had laid aside to take on human flesh. (Phil. 2:6–11)

Of course the disciples could not bear what Jesus had to tell them. All they had was their human minds, the 'mind of the flesh.' They needed the 'mind of Christ' within them to comprehend the deep things of Spirit that Jesus wanted to share. (1 Cor. 2:10–16) Of course He had to go away before He could send His Spirit to dwell in them. As a physical man, He was limited to one time and place. But when He ascended to heaven to take His rightful place with the eternal Father, His Spirit was freed from the limitations of the physical realm. Now His Holy Spirit could dwell within anyone and everyone who would accept Him. And of course His Spirit was then able to guide them into all truth. As a physical man, His spirit only knew what the Father told Him, but as almighty God, His Holy Spirit has all authority, power, wisdom, and knowledge.

That is an awesome concept. Stop and think. Which is better, to know someone who has the Living Water, or to have the Living Water within you? Which is better, to be able to sit at the feet of Him who has the Words of eternal life, or to have the eternal Living Word within you? Which is better, to live beside the King of the universe, or live in Him and He in you?!

I have no doubt that the Holy Spirit Jesus promised is Himself, in spirit form, "... according to the Spirit of Holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. 1:4) "... God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal. 4:6) "...But we have the mind of Christ." (1 Cor. 2:16)

Note that the Holy Spirit could move, fill, and empower people before Christ was glorified. "... Moses said to him, 'Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all YHWH's people were prophets, that YHWH would put His Spirit upon them!'" (Num. 11:29) "...the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the suffering of Christ and the glories to follow." (1 Peter 1:10–11) "... and he [John the Baptist] will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb." (Lk. 1:15) "...Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit." (Lk. 1:41) "And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied..." (Lk. 1:67) Many times throughout the Bible, the Holy Spirit came upon God's chosen vessels. But now we see a big difference.

No one before had ever been baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire. This concept is so important it is in all four Gospels. (Matt. 3:11–17; Mk. 1:7–11; Lk. 3:16–22; and Jn. 1:29–34) I'll try to summarize it here. Remember that the Holy Spirit is the third Person/Aspect of the Trinity, sent by the Father from eternity to communicate Himself within this realm of space and time. He came here at the beginning of time, when Jesus shouted triumphantly, "Let there be light!" From then on, the Spirit filled Jesus with the Father, led Jesus to do the Father's will, was sent out by Jesus to the prophets to speak the Father's word and learn His wisdom, and constantly expressed the Father's nature and character – always through Jesus, for He is the only way back to the eternal Father.

But when Jesus became a man, He laid aside His divinity, His 'glory,' His 'fire,' for a time. For a time, the eternal Father had no perfect, divine being through whom He could express the fullness of His Spirit. Zacharias, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, John the Baptist, even Jesus Himself could only be 'filled with the Spirit' up to their limited human capacities. Even Jesus had to struggle for it, sometimes spending all night in prayer wrestling with the Father for wisdom and power to minister.

When Jesus was glorified, something changed. He had His 'fire' back. He had won the victory over sin and death. He was given the "name above all names" (Phil. 2:9) and all power and authority in heaven and earth, before whom every knee shall bow. He again became the fullest possible expression of the Father into our space-time realm. But now, *for the first time*, He had a people – the church, cleansed by the power of His blood – whom He could entrust with the fullness of His Spirit, a people within whom He could dwell, just as the Father dwelt in Him. John the Baptist prophesied, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." He did exactly that on Pentecost when He came down with His fire in the Person of the Holy Spirit to dwell permanently within His disciples.

Incredible, that the King of Heaven, the God of Glory, the holy "consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29), could dwell within this weak and foolish vessel. Incredible, but true. This is the heart of the gospel, the promise of God. If God says anything at all to us through the Bible it is this: "I love you, My child! I want to live in your heart, and you in Mine. I want to perfect you and guard you from evil. I want to give you My Spirit, My mind, My nature, and teach you My ways, so you can see things as I see them and walk with Me into the beauty, peace, and joy of My eternal life. I want to lavish My love upon you and receive your love in return." This is a 'happily ever after' better than any fairy tale, "... Christ in you, the hope of glory!" (Col. 1:27)

The Kingdom Is a Party!

We tend to look at Old Testament living as a real drag – so many laws to keep, so many sacrifices, rituals, ceremonies; what a chore! Praise God that in Christ we are set free from the old ceremonial law!

But wait. Something's wrong with this picture. "These things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." (1 Cor. 10:11) What can we learn from all those old ceremonies that God commanded the Jews?

One thing: they weren't just ceremonies. They were feasts, celebrations, and in them, Jews were commanded to rejoice – to eat, drink, and be merry.

"And you shall surely tithe all the produce from what you sow... And you shall eat in the presence of YHWH your God, at the place where He chooses to establish His name, the tithe of your grain, your new wine, your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and your flock, in order that you may learn to fear YHWH your God always. And if the distance is too great for you that you are not able to bring the tithe... then you shall exchange it for money... you may spend the money for whatever your heart desires, for oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, or whatever your heart desires; and there you shall eat in the presence of YHWH your God and rejoice, you and your household." (Deut. 14:22–26) "... Go, eat of the fat, and drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to YHWH. Do not be grieved, for the joy of YHWH is your strength." (Neh. 8:10) "... You shall rejoice before YHWH your God for seven days. You shall celebrate it – a feast to YHWH for seven days each year, as a perpetual statute throughout your generations..." (Lev. 23:40–41)

Why did God have to command them to rejoice? And why does He have to command us to rejoice? “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!” (Phil. 4:4) “Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks...” (1 Thess. 5:16–18) “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.” (James 1:2–3) Could it be that our rejoicing, even if we don’t feel like it, even when things don’t seem to be going well, is a means that God uses to strengthen our faith? After all, if we say we believe God to be good, loving, all-powerful, all-wise, ever-present, all-knowing, absolutely sovereign, and so on, but groan and complain when things go wrong, aren’t we then saying that He was not quite good enough, or loving enough, or powerful enough, or wise enough for us at the moment? But if we stand firm in faith and rejoice in trials, we are a living vindication of the truth of His Word: “We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” (Rom. 8:28)

That is walking in the Kingdom. And yes, I do believe that the Kingdom of God is one continuous party: a joyous celebration in gratefulness, love, and delight of the Lord and His goodness, faithfulness, mercy, and grace toward us; a living, breathing demonstration to the world of unshakeable faith and trust in the God who is always faithful.

There are four main characteristics of a party that I believe apply here. First, most parties are given in honor of someone. Second, when you are at a party, you generally try to put aside any complaining, offenses, and squabbles, and everyone just determines to have a good time. Third, once the party starts, you put aside your work and worry and just relax, play, and enjoy the moment. Fourth, most parties involve exchanging gifts and feasting on the special foods and drinks provided.

This Kingdom party is indeed given in honor of someone: Jesus Christ the King of kings and Lord of lords! We honor Him in our grateful worship, in obeying His commands, and in joyously granting Him full freedom to live out His life in us and demonstrate His nature and character through us.

At this Kingdom party, we definitely put aside all the squabbles and complaining and determine to rejoice in all things, in faith that the Master of the feast is the sovereign King of the Universe, who has it all in perfect control, loves us with a perfect love, and wants only the best for His beloved.

In this Kingdom party, we not only get to put aside our work and worry, we are ordered to rest! We'll get into the Sabbath Rest later, but believe me, in this Kingdom party, there is no place for human labors, our fleshly efforts, worries, anxiousness, and struggles. The labor is done and the victory is won in Christ Jesus, whose works are complete from the foundation of the world. Anything His Holy Spirit leads us to do in the Kingdom is all joy and delight, as it is done by His wisdom and strength which He provides freely to His saints. "Come unto Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." (Matt. 11:28–30) His work is more like play, fun, recreation!

Fourth, and this is a biggie, so I saved it for last: in this Kingdom party, we have a grand feast and gift exchange, the biggest celebration in the universe. No one is left out. The King's goodies are delicious and abundant. Everyone in the Kingdom gets presents, tailor-made just for him or her, along with all the excitement and delight of opening them up, trying them out, learning to use them, and sharing them with others. What's more, the feasting and the gift-exchange never ends!

What? You say you were left out? You never got a present? Ahh... I assure you, even if you are just entering the Kingdom, you have lots of presents. Perhaps you haven't yet discovered them, or opened them up, or learned to use them, but they are waiting, and they are yours, yours to enjoy and to share!

The first and best gifts are those which start this Kingdom party: the gift of eternal life and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said to the woman at the well, "Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." (Jn. 4:13–14) "My sheep hear My voice. I know them, and they follow Me. I give eternal life to them; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand." (Jn. 10:27–28) "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (Lk. 11:13) "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us His Spirit." (1 Jn. 4:13) No one can enter God's Kingdom without receiving the gifts of eternal life and the Holy Spirit. And with them come gifts to enable us to receive them: He justifies us (Rom. 3:24), pours out His grace, 'quickens' (imparts life to) our souls (Eph. 2:5–8), opens our spiritual eyes, and gives us the faith to believe His promises.

Beyond this, there are (at least) three categories of gifts in the Kingdom. I believe that every child of the Kingdom has some (possibly many) from each category: gifts of **fruit**, talents or gifts of **ministry**, and special or miraculous **effects**. "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Cor. 12:4–7)

Let's start with **gifts of fruit**. Fruit is the tasty stuff that just naturally grows on the branch as long as the branch is rightly attached to a living fruit tree or vine. "I am the vine, and you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing." (Jn. 15:5) Everyone walking in the Kingdom bears fruit! No exceptions! Including, I believe, some of every variety of Kingdom fruit. Simply ask the King! There is an abundance of fruit on the table at this Kingdom party, and no one needs to go hungry! Let's whet our appetites by listing a few of the many kinds of fruit on this lavish Kingdom table. "For the Kingdom of God is not [physically] eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 14:17)

Right after saying that no one practicing the deeds of the flesh will inherit the Kingdom of God, (Gal. 5:21) the apostle Paul tells us about the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The implication is that we who do practice these will inherit the Kingdom of God. We may think of fruit as stuff we do for God, like souls we win for His Kingdom. But He thinks of fruit as aspects of His nature and character which we eat and digest and which become part of us, growing within us to make us a 'new creature,' with a new nature. "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (2 Cor. 5:17)

Human love is self-focused, unable to love the unlovely; human joy is shallow and fleeting; human peace is a sham; human patience soon wears thin; human kindness is tinged with selfishness; human goodness may be just hypocrisy; human faithfulness is merely conditional; human gentleness blows apart in the winds of anger and bitterness; and human self-control evaporates when someone crosses our will. Come to the King's table! Ask and receive the finest of His fruits.

God is love. (1 Jn. 4:8, 16) The Holy Spirit grants us joy. (1 Thess. 1:6) Jesus promised us His peace. (Jn. 14:27; 16:33) God's patience and kindness are awesome. (Rom. 2:4) Only He is truly good. (Mk. 10:18) His mercy and faithfulness are everlasting. (Ps. 100:5) Jesus is gentle. (Matt. 11:29) True self-control is Holy Spirit control. Every one of the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22–23 is a part of God's divine nature, which He wants to give us so they become our nature!

To broadly paraphrase 2 Peter 1:3–4: “The power of God, through the knowledge of Jesus Christ, has given us many great and precious promises, and they are all wrapped up in one thing: that we become like Him, yes, even partake of His divine nature!” What a gift! What a party!

There is more. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given him.” (James 1:5) “YHWH gives wisdom; from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding.” (Prov. 2:6) “Teach me good discernment and knowledge, for I believe...” (Ps. 119:125) “... to give prudence to the naïve, to the youth knowledge and discretion.” (Prov. 1:4) “... God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6) “Now may the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves according to Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 15:5) “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” (Phil. 4:13) There are many more, but this one sums it up: “God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything [wow!], you may have an abundance for every good deed; as it is written: ‘He scattered abroad, He gave gifts to the poor, His righteousness abides forever.’ Now, He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.” Double wow! (2 Cor. 9:8–10) Have some fruit!

Talents and gifts of ministry must come second. There are no talents or ministries acceptable to God without first partaking of the fruits of the Spirit; conversely, living by the fruits of the Spirit will inevitably result in talents and gifts of ministry. Fill up on His fruit, and that will give you the inner strength to minister – the strength of His nature in you!

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore He says, ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive [He bound the sin and death that had held us in bondage], and He gave gifts to men’ . . . He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph. 4:7–13)

These are called the ‘five-fold ministries.’ For many years I excused myself saying that I was not gifted as any of those five. Well, now that I have been strengthened by eating more fruit, I see it quite differently. An apostle is simply one sent with God’s message, such as a missionary. An evangelist is one who spreads the gospel among the unsaved. A prophet is one who proclaims God’s Word to the church. A pastor is one who is called to shepherd the flock of God at a local assembly. And a teacher is one who expounds God’s Word. Why, with those definitions, I can see at least a minimal gifting in all five of those ministries. (And you probably can too.) I may never be a great evangelist in darkest Africa or may never prophesy the future or pastor the Crystal Cathedral, but I can sure carry the gospel to a neighbor who’s never heard, or proclaim the Word of the Lord on a verse He has just made alive to me, or pastor the little flock that is made up of my own family, or teach God’s Word to my own kidlies.

You see, these are gifts. Our Father loves to give gifts to His children! You don't have to be known as the Right Reverend So and So to receive a gift from our Father! Yes, I know, there are some who are called to a lifetime of committed service and I'm not minimizing that; a full-time evangelist, missionary, or pastor is certainly worthy of honor. But what about a Sunday-school teacher? Or the Christian with an encouraging word for a hurting friend? Or an employee who shares the gospel with his co-worker? Or the one who cares enough to give a stern exhortation to one who is going astray? What about me, or you, when by the Holy Spirit we see a need and know that the ministry of the Holy Spirit through us just might meet it?

I believe that walking in the Kingdom is being sensitive by the Holy Spirit to the needs around us and asking Him for these ministry gifts when the need arises – yes, even to the point of developing a gift until it becomes a talent, a regular ministry, or a lifetime calling! Walking in the Kingdom isn't sitting around saying, "I believe." It is putting my faith into action in service of the King; it is being led by the Holy Spirit in what I say and do, to equip the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ. I can help with that. So can you, by the ministry gifts that He provides to all who ask.

So, which of these ministry gifts, according to Scripture, is the most important? Not surprisingly, the one most abused, maligned, and even avoided by the modern Christian church! "Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy." (1 Cor. 14:1) Although it may take a special anointing to be a prophet, the implication here is that any child of the King may seek after and receive the gift of prophesy. The apostle Paul goes on to explain what he means: "One who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation... If all prophesy [this is possible and even desirable!] and an unbeliever or ungifted man enters,

he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you... for you can all prophesy one by one so that all may learn and all may be exhorted... Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy [the most needed of the ministry gifts], and [in contrast] do not forbid to speak in tongues [the least needed of any of the gifts]. But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner.” (vs 3, 24–25, 31, 39–40)

We in the modern church have kind of shied away from prophesy, because it has been so abused in the past by those who thundered, “Thus saith the Lord!” to unleash their own ungodly schemes and programs. But prophecy is still biblical, and it is still needed in the church. I believe it is the most important of the ministry gifts, and that the best pastor, teacher, apostle, or evangelist is one who also exercises the gift of prophesy in his ministry. I’m not talking about telling the future or prophesying Scripture! That probably would take a special anointing and confirmation from God. I am talking about discerning what the Lord is trying to say through a Scripture passage or a situation, finding the Father’s will in it, hearing the cry of God’s heart, and then telling people.

I cannot deny that ungodly men have used their gift of prophecy to lead others astray, to glorify themselves, and to draw others into a man-centered cult. The dangers can be avoided by verse 29: “And let two or three prophets speak and let the others pass judgment [discernment].” One with the true gift of prophecy is humble, always willing to let others prophesy beside him and to accept the discernment of the body. We must be willing to be held accountable and to lovingly hold one another accountable, building solidly on God’s truth in His written Word. Remember what I said before about always building foursquare on our foundation.

“Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God... so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever.” (1 Peter 4:11) That is the gift of prophesy.

Another ministry gift has raised some controversy. There is no doubt that the first century apostles were uniquely anointed as ‘the twelve’ and promised places of great authority in the Kingdom. (Matt. 19:28) Thus some claim that the gift of apostle passed away along with the gift of prophet. I agree that there will never be another Samuel, or Ezekiel, or Daniel writing Scripture, or another Matthew or apostle Paul “sitting on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” But really, ‘apostle’ simply means: ‘one who is sent with a message.’ Anyone called to spread the gospel message could be using that gift, just like anyone proclaiming the word of the Lord could be using the gift of prophecy.

Perhaps the apostles and prophets in Scripture were uniquely gifted to write Scripture, but that doesn’t stop God from giving the same gifts to ministers and missionaries today. Go back to Ephesians 4:13 and ask yourself, “Have we all attained to full unity, knowledge, and maturity up to the full measure of the stature of Christ?” That we haven’t should be obvious! The ministry gifts are given until we do, according to Scripture, and I must say that they are desperately needed.

“For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.” (Rom. 11:29) Isn’t that fascinating! All God gave you is forever yours. He doesn’t take it back due to your weakness and foolishness. So just get past your fears and accept His gifts by faith.

I believe that these ministry gifts and talents are the meat and potatoes of the Kingdom feast, and that our asking for, using, and developing these gifts are what makes us strong in the Kingdom, useful in service to the King.

This Kingdom party has one more category of gifts from the Master of the feast. We could call it the desert – and oh how sweet it is! The apostle Paul called it ‘effects’; the word means ‘energizings’ of the Spirit. These are the special or **miraculous gifts**, given supernaturally by our sovereign God just for specific purposes or occasions. Yes, our God is still a miracle-working God! Always was, always will be.

Desert is special, but it is rare – a little goes a long way. We rarely see an abundance of miracles, except in Jesus’ earthly ministry, and He did not fall to the temptation of pride or idolatry as we might. God wants our faith to rest on His Word, not on seeing the miracles. He knows our weakness. How many miracles can God do through you before you start getting proud? For myself it hovers barely above none. How many miracles can we witness before we start idolizing the vessel? Besides, Satan is able to do miracles too, and he will if he thinks he can trick us into giving him our faith or worship.

We are told to ask our Father for the gifts of the Spirit, but these miracle gifts are not freely given out to anyone who asks! We are warned: “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. . . . God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.” (1 Cor. 12:11, 18) It is up to Him, not us.

The ‘special effects’ (miracle gifts) listed here (vs 8–10) are: the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, special faith, gifts of healing, working miracles, special prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues, and interpreting tongues.

Verse 7 implies that every Christian gets at least one of these gifts. “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” But verses 29–31 imply that they are not all granted to everyone. “All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they?”

No, the Spirit distributes these gifts just as He wills, because only He knows just what gifts are needed, when, where, and through whom – and who might succumb to the temptation to pride. “We have gifts that differ according to the grace given us...” (Rom. 12:6) Praise God for the differences! Differing gifts and talents show us how much we need each other.

The gift of tongues is a valid miracle gift. It was originally given at Pentecost, as speaking actual unknown languages. (Acts 2) It should not be forbidden. (1 Cor. 14:39) Yet public use can degenerate into an unedifying babble, of little value to others unless it is properly interpreted. (14:4–19)

I find it interesting that verse 28 mixes some of the talent and ministry gifts with some miracle gifts. It also adds two more ministry gifts: those of helps and administrations. The implication to me is that my categories must not limit God; He can turn a miracle gift into a full blown ministry or talent if He chooses. If He wants to take a special desert and turn it into a main course, praise Him! It’s His party!

Romans 12 adds more ministry gifts: service, exhortation, giving, leading, and showing mercy, along with two from the five-fold ministry gifts: prophet and teacher. Just in case you feel undeserving of any of the five, God has plenty of others for you to try on. You do have a ministry! God makes sure of it.

I believe that God wants us “all to attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” To do that, development and regular use of these gifts is essential. Pray to receive various gifts. “You do not have because you do not ask.” (James 4:2) Pursue the best gifts, as God lays it on your heart. Expect Him to answer, for “...he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to the Father.” (Jn. 14:12)

Allow me to give a true example—an old friend named Jim. He was called, gifted, and anointed as an apostle, and all the years I knew him, he functioned as one. He had a vision for spotting areas where there was no work of God and starting one. He also would pastor each new foundational work until he could groom a pastor to take over the task. And he was evangelizing everywhere he went! While I wouldn't call him a prophet, yet many times I heard him prophesy the Word of the Lord with great boldness and zeal, teaching and exhorting us with both skill and passion for the truth. I also saw a few miracles gifts in Jim. Though rare, they did strengthen my faith and help to validate the ministry of the Lord through him. He was given a special word of divine wisdom or a word of knowledge at times. Sometimes the Lord granted him the discernment of spirits. But miracles were not his focus; he just wanted to be used by God to further His Kingdom and wasn't interested in any glory for himself. He served us humbly, gave of himself to us, lead us, and in all of it, he demonstrated all the fruits of the Spirit, which I'm sure He feasted on daily. I think that's how it should be, don't you? Would to God every believer were as balanced as he.

“These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick and they will recover.” (Mk. 16:17–18) That is just a brief summary, not an all-inclusive list, and a believer should not expect to do everything listed. But I know God is able and willing to give us His miracle-working power when the need arises—if it will not cause us to stumble in pride or idolatry and if it will further His Kingdom and bring Him glory.

So, come join the Kingdom party. Partake of the banquet. The Master of the feast, the King, bids you come.

The Repentant Saint

“... You also are the called of Jesus Christ... who are beloved of God in Rome, called saints [holy ones]: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 1:6–7) “He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints [holy ones] according to the will of God,” (8:27) “But now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints.” (15:25) “Does any one of you, when he has a dispute against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” (1 Cor. 6:1–2) “... For God is not a God of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.” (14:33) “Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.” (2 Cor. 13:12–13)

In these and many other places, the apostle Paul quite freely addresses the believers as saints. Yet we know that believers in those days were no more holy than those today – some at Corinth may have even been worse! What are we who are seeking first the Kingdom to call ourselves? Does it matter?

I believe it matters very much what we call ourselves and how we think of ourselves. I believe that our words and thoughts and the confession of our lips need to line up with the Word of God, and if they do not, we are unnecessarily opening ourselves up to temptation.

The Roman Catholic tradition is to reserve the term *saint* for someone who has been especially holy and has led a life full of good works, and even then he usually doesn't get awarded the title until after he's dead. I believe that tradition has done us a great disservice, putting the concept of *saint* out of reach of us common everyday believers and putting their saints on a pedestal to be worshipped or prayed to.

But the Bible calls us saints, not as an honorary title but as a down-to-earth fact. If we are believers, if we have dealt scripturally with our sins by confession and honest heart-felt repentance, if we have received by faith the promise of forgiveness by the blood of Jesus Christ and believed in our hearts that His suffering and death on the cross was to take away our sins and give us right standing before God, then we who are walking in the Kingdom are saints by virtue of our faith in Jesus Christ no matter how sinful we may have been.

What difference does it make? Is this just a semantics squabble? No. It's a point of perspective. Do you prefer to see yourself as God sees you or as Satan sees you? The devil sees you as a sinner, and he is constantly trying to bring accusation against you, to remind you of past sins, to drag you back down into them, and to tell you that you'll never do any better – that you'll always be just a weak and helpless sinner. He would love to keep you wallowing in condemnation and despair. And how does God see us? “If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin... If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 Jn. 1:7, 9) God sees us as cleansed, holy, righteous – a saint!

But, verse 8 is also true: “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” We who seek first the Kingdom are very aware of our sinful nature, of our weaknesses in the flesh and our total dependence upon God. We must always retain a humble, repentant attitude. The pride of considering myself so saintly that I'm beyond temptation or worldliness, could easily (and usually does) lead to a big fall. That is why I entitled this section *The Repentant Saint*. We must never lose our awareness of our utter, total depravity apart from the marvelous grace of God.

But the other side of that coin is also true: If I merely look at myself as a weak, helpless sinner, saved by grace, then I am only expecting myself to fall into sin the next time temptation rolls around. In fact, I have the perfect ‘excuse’ – of course I fell into sin; I’m a sinner, what do you expect?! And it’s all God’s fault because I prayed that He would “lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil.”

I dislike the phrase “sinner, saved by grace.” Why? It is incomplete and therefore misleading. The completed thought should be, “I was a sinner, but I have been saved from my sin by God’s grace.” Do you spot the difference?

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.” (Rom. 13:14) This is a fascinating verse. It’s an exhortation to not let anything stay in my life which could tempt me back into sin. An obvious way to heed this verse would be to cleanse my house of anything worldly, sensual, or demonic. A less obvious way is to agree with God’s Word and watch my language so that the confession of my lips does not give Satan an opportunity.

Then the next time Satan comes along to tempt me into sin, I can tell him, “Yes, Satan, I know that I used to be a sinner and do that sort of stuff. But now I am a saint, saved by the precious blood of Jesus Christ my King, and I just can’t do that anymore.” Even a child, when pressured by his peers to get into mischief, can be taught to withstand the temptation by saying, “Jesus lives in my heart, and He wouldn’t like that.”

Does Jesus live in your heart? Then you are a saint, for Jesus is the holy God and cannot tolerate sin in His presence. “Don’t you know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? ... the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.” (1 Cor. 3:16–17; see also 6:19) Yes, we fall short of His glory, but Jesus in us makes up the difference.

I really like a motto that Bill Gothard uses for himself: “Others may, I cannot.” He understands that there is no condemnation in the Kingdom and that God may lead him in different ways from other Christians. But he also understands that the call into the Kingdom is a high and holy calling; it is indeed the call to be saints!

This is a narrow and difficult road to walk – the King’s highway! The devil may blindsides us sometimes and knock us off the highway, but let us not jump off it on our own by confessing only our sinfulness rather than confessing Christ’s righteousness in our lives. This is a walk by faith – faith in His promise to “cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 Jn. 1:9)

“Let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another. With psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, sing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” (Col. 3:16) “... Be filled with the Spirit [when you] speak to one another. In psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, sing and make melody in your heart to the Lord,” (Eph. 5:18–19) “Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever...” (1 Peter 4:11)

Do you get the picture? The poor old sinner saved by grace can do little better than stumble through life, hoping for some future salvation from sin when Jesus returns. But the repentant saint has already been saved from sin, filled with the Holy Spirit, and given the power to become a child of God. Now he is seeking and doing the Father’s will, “perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” (2 Cor. 7:1) The saint is not waiting for the rapture when Jesus will return for His Bride; for him, Jesus has already returned and is living in him! (6:16)

“For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, we know Him thus no longer. Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God! He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him!” (2 Cor. 5:14–21) Wow!

Possessing the Kingdom

“For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience, joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. For He has delivered us from the domain [kingdom] of darkness, and transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son...!” (Col. 1:9–13)

The apostle goes on throughout the whole book of Colossians with one of the most beautiful and inspired descriptions of the Kingdom in the Scripture. I recommend you read it sometime, with your mind especially tuned to see all the references to Jesus Christ: 'in Him,' 'through Him,' 'for Him,' 'to Himself,' and so on. These tiny phrases are packed with depth of Spirit for all who seek first the Kingdom.

Allow me to pick and choose a few to whet your appetite; "He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless, and beyond reproach... the mystery which has been hidden from the ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ. And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power which mightily works within me... and for all those who have not personally seen my face, that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge... As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him, and established in your faith... For in Him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form. In Him you have been made complete, and He is the head [the King!] over all rule and authority... in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands... buried with Him in baptism... raised up with Him through faith... He made you alive together with Him..." (1:22 – 2:13) Then he spends

the rest of the book telling how this wonderful truth works out in our lives – our good deeds, putting aside the deeds of the flesh, bearing with one another, forgiving one another, putting on love, letting the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, letting the word of Christ richly dwell within us, being subject to one another, loving, and being obedient, with the conclusions that “whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus... whatever you do, do it heartily as for the Lord, rather than for men, knowing that from Him you will receive the reward of your inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.” (3:17–24)

Hopefully by now we’re beginning to get the picture that this Kingdom thing is something big, something awesome, something all consuming and all encompassing. You can’t just tack it on to the bottom of your list of life goals. I said before that seeking first the Kingdom is not a trivial task or a casual endeavor. Huh. That’s the understatement of the year.

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field; which a man found and hid, and from the joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of surpassing value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.” (Matt. 13:44–46) There are two different thoughts here, both significant; don’t miss either of them! First: the Kingdom is indeed of surpassing value; it is a treasure worth seeking and worth selling all you have to obtain. To but see it is to want it with all your heart. Second, and this is the one most often missed: the man who found the treasure and recognized its worth, and the merchant who discovered the pearl of surpassing value, took action on it. They went and sold all that they had, and they bought it! They obtained it! They took it home. They owned it! It was now theirs! They paid the price; they got the goods! Hallelujah!

We who were taught that all we have to do on earth is to hang on by our fingernails until Jesus comes at the rapture to whisk us up to heaven, have trouble with this concept. But the fact remains that no one will sell all that he has to buy something that he can't actually have until some undefined future realm after he dies. Stop and think. Would you take thousands of your hard-earned dollars and plunk 'em down on a new car, on the terms that the dealer will keep an eye on you, and ten or twenty years from now if you've been good enough, he'll give you the keys? No! If you put your money on the table, you expect to drive that car home!

And so with the Kingdom. It costs everything. Salvation is a free gift, received by faith. But to obtain the Kingdom, I must not only sell all my possessions, I also have to lay down my own life, my ambitions and desires, my hopes and dreams, everything I am and have. The cost is not just huge; it is infinite as far as I am concerned. Who would, indeed who could, ever pay the price unless he was assured that he could actually have the treasure, the pearl of surpassing value, in his own hot little hands, here, now, not just in some ambiguous 'sweet by and by?'

And don't try to tell me you just "receive it by faith, just like we received salvation" because you and I both know that you get just about as much as you pay for. It costs you very little to say, "I've given my life to Jesus, I am filled with His Spirit, and I'm a child in His Kingdom – by faith." Then someone looks into your life and thinks, "You joker! Who do you think you're kidding? Your life is a shambles of self-centeredness and hypocrisy!" What went wrong? Just this: What costs you nothing has little value to you. You will not, indeed you cannot, really treasure the Kingdom without paying the price. That is a basic characteristic of human nature. What you really value, you labor and sacrifice for.

King David knew that when He said, "... I will not ... offer a burnt offering which costs me nothing." (1 Chron. 21:24) Jesus knew that when He said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth... but lay up for yourselves treasures in [the Kingdom of] Heaven... for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matt. 6:19–21) He is saying to us: "Invest your treasures, your worldly goods, your efforts, your lives, in the Kingdom of Heaven, for if you invest in the Kingdom, your heart will be set on the Kingdom."

That is why the Kingdom of God must be entered by deeds and not just by faith. It has to cost something. In fact, it has to cost everything for it to have the surpassing value to us that it must have. Thank God, He doesn't require it all in one lump sum payment! None of us could afford it. We enter the Kingdom as a child, one baby step at a time. "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all." (Mk. 10:15. See also Matt. 18:3 ff) As soon as we lay down our lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in one area of our little world, He moves on to another area and continues knocking at our heart's door.

Many have paid the price in a few areas of their lives, even some large areas like their finances, or their possessions, or their time, or their eating, or their recreation / entertainment, or their ambitions, or their loved ones. But very few have laid it all down at Jesus' feet and entrusted Him to be the Lord and Master of it all. So He keeps calling, "Seek first My Kingdom, and all these other things will fall into their proper places."

What is the primary characteristic of a little child? Well, he is very dependent. He can do nothing for himself at first. But then he says his first word, takes his first step, and before you know it, he is a responsible adult caring for a lovely wife and six kiddies of his own. That's right! He grows up!

So with the Kingdom. Yes, you enter like a little child, one baby step at a time. But with each step, you grow, and as in the parable of the mustard seed (Matt. 13:31–32) you continue to grow until the birds come to nest in your branches. "... As long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave, although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. So also while we were children, we were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal. 4:1–6)

God never intended for us to pay everything we have and are, just to remain babies all our lives, always helplessly dependent. No. His ultimate goal, His Plan of the Ages is, "... the Ancient of Days came and judgement was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the Kingdom... The saints of the Highest One will receive the Kingdom, and will possess the Kingdom forever, for all ages to come... Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the saints of the Highest One. His Kingdom will be an everlasting Kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him... Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever." (Dan. 7:22, 18, 27;12:3)

True Christians accept that and look forward to it, as they look forward to the second coming of our Lord. Our mistake was thinking that we had to remain babies until He made us instant rulers in His Kingdom! He doesn't work that way.

No baby goes from a helpless infant to a mature adult overnight. “But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day.” (Prov. 4:18) Good morning, young saint! This is the dawning of the Kingdom! We saints are going to shine brighter and brighter until the full day, and that means we’ve got a lot of growing to do!

God uses means. He uses suffering, discipline, trials, dark and bleak times, reproof and correction from others, struggle, paying the price. This is not a cheap kingdom handed to you on a silver platter. It is an exceedingly costly Kingdom of surpassing value. You must give your all to obtain it. You must be willing to suffer the loss of all things, yes even your health and life itself, to receive the Kingdom. For the Lord to be your shepherd, you must let Him lead you through the valley of the shadow of death as well as guiding you in His paths of righteousness. (Ps. 23) We all like the mountain tops, but we forget that the rich, well-watered soil, the fast-growing plants, and all the fruit is borne down in the valleys! Yes, we can delight in the Lord on the mountain tops, but to bring forth the harvest of the Kingdom, we must return to the valleys.

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” (James 1:2–4)

And in those valleys, in those trials and testing of our faith, we learn to really trust the Holy Spirit’s leading and protecting us, we learn to rest our faith on His faithfulness, we learn to obey His prompting and do His works, we develop His nature and character and let it shine through us to all around us, and yes, we discover that the Kingdom is indeed within us after all.

That is possessing the Kingdom.

Suffering in the Kingdom

Suffering is not just prerequisite to possessing the Kingdom. Selling all that you have to buy the pearl of surpassing value is not just to own the pearl. God has a far better plan than that. If it were simply a matter of possessing the Kingdom, we could relax: “Fear not, little flock, for it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.” (Lk. 12:32) Piece of cake. Just reach out your hand and take it.

But no. That chapter on *Possessing the Kingdom* is just the beginning, the first baby steps into the Kingdom. We see that precious pearl and we want it desperately; we want it enough to sell all we have to possess it. That’s pretty straightforward. And that’s how it must be. But have we ever stopped to count the cost of our stewardship of that pearl?!

“... Heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.” (Rom. 8:17) We have been looking at our sufferings as a necessary discipline to perfect us so that we may be glorified with Christ – the price we must pay to possess the Kingdom. That is true, and I am not negating it. But there is a higher call: to participate in and know the fellowship of His suffering.

“... Whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish [dung] in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” (Phil. 3:7–11)

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing... after you have suffered for a little, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” (1 Peter 4:12–13; 5:10) “... He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” (Heb. 12:10–11)

So is it worth it? “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us...” (Rom. 8:18) It’s more than worth it! The value of what we give up cannot even be compared with the surpassing value of the Kingdom we receive.

“... But you have come to Mt. Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born enrolled in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant... See that you do not refuse Him who is speaking, for if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven. And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.’ And this ‘Yet once more.’ denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a Kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude by which we may offer to God an acceptable service in reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.” (Heb. 12:22–29)

Do you catch it? This is God's Plan of the Ages. The way into the Kingdom is only through the fire. "... Through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22) He hides the treasure until we begin to see its value. Then we are willing to pay the price! He grows and matures us step by step, teaching us, disciplining us, allowing suffering to develop in us endurance, patience, faithfulness, and all the rest of His own character and wisdom, preparing us to rule with Him in His Kingdom. He gives us a little taste of His Kingdom here and there to encourage us to want it. But we must resist the temptation to settle for the little taste as if that's all there is. It is His earnest desire and delight to give us just as much of the Kingdom as we can handle.

Our problem is that as babies we can't handle very much! We're too ignorant and double-minded, too comfortable with that human nature we've had since birth, too fearful of falling, and waaaaay too self-focused. That is the nature of a baby.

But, "... We are to be no longer children, tossed here and there by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head [the King!] even Christ." (Eph. 4:14-15) That's why God gave ministries in the church: "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (4:12-13) That is the Kingdom, the goal. That's what we're praying for when we say "Thy Kingdom come... on earth as it is in heaven." That's what we are to seek as our highest priority. That's why we pay the price, lay down our lives, and even joyously accept trials and suffering – to grow up in all aspects into the head, to the fullness of Christ; to partake of the divine nature. (2 Peter 1:4)

“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.” (Col. 1:24) That is an incredible and rarely understood concept. How can anything be lacking in Christ’s sufferings? Was His work on the cross incomplete? He tasted death for everyone. (Heb. 2:9) All the sins of the whole world fell on Him. (1 Jn. 2:2) “For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all...” (Rom. 6:10) How could His suffering possibly be incomplete?

The answer, as is typical in the Kingdom, is surprisingly simple. Yes, the sufferings relating to His sacrifice for sin was complete by His death on the cross and three days in hell. So, what suffering is He feeling now? Have you looked into His heart? Have you seen His burden for the lost, the perishing, the ignorant and hard hearted, those enslaved to sin, bound, blind, even dead in trespasses and sins? Have you felt the agony of His soul as long as even one of His precious little lambs for whom He died remains out lost in the mountains, far away from fold of the Great Shepherd? Have you sensed the earnest cry of His Spirit toward His sons who remain helpless babies, struggling with temptations and fleshly lusts more powerful than they? Have you entered into His prayers and intercessions with groanings too deep for words? Have you seen His distress, His anguish, the depths of His grief, the travail of His soul, the longing of His heart as with infinite love He awaits the birth of each saint into His Kingdom?

Have we suffered with Him? Or do we suffer only for ourselves, for our own discipline and maturing? Have we felt His anguished longing? Have we entered into His sufferings for the lost, for the saved, even for the saints? Have we travailed with Him to bring to birth the Kingdom within the hearts of His chosen ones, His treasure, His inheritance in the saints, God’s own precious possession? (Eph. 1:11, 14, 18)

Romans 8 gives us a glimpse into God's heart, hinting at His infinite love. "For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first-fruits of [God's Holy] Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body... In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." (vs 19–26)

What does God get out of this? Let's begin to look at it from His perspective; let us tune into His heart. "... We have the mind of Christ." (1 Cor. 2:16) What is His mind, His heart?

"... He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." (Heb. 7:25) "Oh, my children, with whom I am in labor [travail] until Christ is formed in you..." (Gal. 4:19) "Come to Me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matt. 11:28–30) What is your yoke, Lord? *"My yoke is My love for My people. Your love is not enough. Only when you love with My love can you walk with Me in My Kingdom. Only then can you know the fellowship of My sufferings and the power of My resurrection. My burden of intercession for My precious ones is only joy and delight as we see them entering the Kingdom! Here, share My burden. Take My yoke on you..."*

God's Plan of the Ages

Ephesians is another glorious, Kingdom-oriented Epistle. We who seek first the Kingdom would do well to spend a lot of time in it. As I did with Galatians and Colossians, allow me to choose some of the highlights. Again be tuned to pick up all those little prepositions that are so loaded with meaning: 'in Christ,' 'through Christ,' 'with Christ,' or 'to Christ.'

The apostle Paul writes to those "who are faithful in Christ Jesus... Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself... In Him we have redemption... He made known to us the mystery of His will [this is His Plan of the Ages] according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration [i.e., the Kingdom!] suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, *the summing up of all things in Christ, things in heaven and things upon the earth* [i.e. everything!]. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance... you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory... I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe, in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which he brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenlies, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.

“And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head [King!] over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all... But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (Eph. 1:1 – 2:7, excerpts)

Then he reminds the Ephesians how they were pagans, Gentiles, uncircumcised, separate from Christ and excluded from the covenants of promise, “... having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both [Jews and pagans] into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the [old Jewish ceremonial] law of commandments and ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, in Himself having put to death the enmity [by the cross].

“And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.” (2:12–22)

Paul then talks about how he was given special revelation and "...insight into the mystery of Christ." He then goes on to define this mystery: "... that the Gentiles [pagans] are fellow-heirs, fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister [servant]... To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles [pagans] the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the [spirit] rulers and authorities in the heavenlies. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose [God's Plan of the Ages, literally God's purpose for time], which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him." (3:4-12)

Paul then launches into his Kingdom prayer, the most awesome statement in Scripture of our position 'in Christ': "For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the [infinite] love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to the utter fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the [Holy Spirit] power that works within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." (3:14-21)

Wow! That is the Kingdom!

And he doesn't stop there, either. He goes on to exhort us to be "... diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all in through all and in all. [Can you believe it?] But to each one of us grace was given according the measure of Christ's gift." (4:3-7)

Then Paul goes into his awesome discussion of the reason for the gifts and ministries in the church: "... for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (4:12-13)

Pure Kingdom, pure Kingdom! I hate to pollute it with my all-too-human discussion. Yet there are some things here that many of us (myself included) have missed far too long, simply because we are preconditioned by our human understanding.

First, a small thing, yet something that many miss, partly because most Bible translators miss it. The 'eternal purpose' of God which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord (3:11) should actually be translated 'purpose of the ages,' as it is in the margin of my NASB. I call it 'God's Plan of the Ages.' The Greek root word here translated 'eternal' (165 in Strong's Concordance) is 'aeon,' from which we get our English word 'eon.' It means a period or an age of time. The word-picture from the equivalent Old Testament Hebrew word 'olam' is 'time out of mind' or an indefinite period of time beyond our knowledge or comprehension. These two words can properly be translated 'forever,' meaning 'for all time,' especially where they are doubled in Scripture, as we do in 'forever and ever.' The one thing they cannot mean is 'eternal,' since eternity is always right now and has no time involved.

This is something hard for us time-based creatures to comprehend, but it is important to the understanding of this passage. God dwells in eternity. He always 'is.' Jesus said, "...before Abraham was born, I Am." (Jn. 8:58) This was a clear statement of His divinity as a dweller in eternity. Eternity and time are two very different things. Time was created; eternity, well, is! Time had a beginning and will have an end; eternity still just is. Time can never connect with eternity. It never reaches it no matter how many ages flow by. Never has. Never will. Yet eternity connects with time at all points. A dweller in eternity can see any point in time as 'now.' So saying things like 'eternity past' and 'eternity future' is foolish; they are oxymorons – like 'deafening silence' or 'government intelligence.' If it has to do with the past or the future, it cannot have anything to do with eternity. It must be based within this realm we call the space-time continuum.

That's a paradox, I know, but the answer is that God and God alone can bridge the gap, and indeed He has done so in Jesus Christ, His ambassador from eternity sent to escort us back to the Father in eternity. That is why Jesus can so authoritatively say, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but by Me." (Jn. 14:6) That is true in essence as well as by edict. Even Adam and Eve could not come to the Father but by Jesus, because Jesus is the one and only way to eternity. Jesus is the fullest possible expression of the infinite Father into this very limited space-time realm.

That is the true meaning of the King James Bible term, "the only begotten Son of God." (eq. Jn. 3:16–18) Jesus is the bridge between time and eternity. When Adam and Eve walked and talked with God in the cool of the day, they were with Jesus! Jesus is the one who met Joshua with the drawn sword at Jericho. Jesus is the one who wrestled with Jacob and called him Israel. And it is the Holy Spirit of Jesus who fills us.

I know this seems like a bunny trail, but hang in there; I will catch my bunny. This is significant! The apostle Paul is not just talking about God's eternal purpose in Ephesians! Yes, he is talking about God's purpose which He determined from eternity and which will have its conclusion in eternity, (He gives us eternal life!) but if that's all we understand about it, we'll miss it. This is God's purpose for time, for the eons – God's Plan of the Ages! If God just wanted perfect, ageless, unchanging beings to keep Him company in eternity, He could have created them. But He wanted more, much more...

You see, in eternity all choices are made. There can be no change, no growth, no risk, no success or failure, no choices affecting our destiny. In eternity, God cannot change, or He would not be God. If He were to learn something, that would mean there was a time when He was not omniscient. If He were to grow in wisdom or power, that would mean there was a time when He was not all-wise or all-powerful. Do you see it? If eternity permitted us to choose between good and evil, there would have to be a time before and after the choice.

God wants to give us that freewill choice. We need time to make it! God's Plan of the Ages is to start with an immature, almost helpless child of God and present him with choice after choice, complete with discipline and consequences, always with the goal of maturing him into divine love and fellowship in Christ Jesus. Time then becomes a wonderful gift of God, given to us for the purpose of change. How foolish to fritter away the years on the mundane process of 'making a living' when we could be seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, growing in wisdom and knowledge, maturing in His nature and character, learning to love and fear Him, and learning to dwell with Him in the secret place of His presence – yes, so we can enter in with Him into His quiet place of perfection and completeness called eternity!

Though He is almighty, infinite, eternal, changeless God (Heb. 13:8), even Jesus grew and changed when He entered our space-time realm. “Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” (Lk. 2:52) “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered; and having been made perfect, He became to all who obey Him the source of eternal salvation.” (Heb. 5:8–9) We know from Scripture that Jesus actually laid aside His divine nature and took on Himself the nature of weak human flesh. (See Phil. 2:5–11) Yes, He had to work to memorize Scripture, He prayed to find the will of the Father, and He struggled with temptation just like we do! The reason now is clear: “We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things just as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb. 4:15–16)

Angels were given the gift of time and choice before Adam and Eve were even created. Lucifer chose self, in rebellion against the King. A lot of angels, whom we now call demons, followed him. But the majority of the angels chose to remain faithful to God. This caused a ‘Great Controversy’ in the heavenlies. With time came the possibility of consequences! The angels wondered whose way was best. Lucifer told them, “Follow me in rebellion! We’ll do whatever we please! We don’t need God! We’ll have our own kingdom. We can create our own pleasures and delights! We can all be as great as God Himself!” The angels who had not yet rebelled asked God, “Is Lucifer right? Does his choice end in happiness and pleasure?”

Now God, being almighty, could have simply annihilated Lucifer and his demons or banned them from His universe. But no. God is love, and if He had done that, the rest of the angels would have served Him only out of fear of His wrath.

From then on they would have wondered, “Maybe Lucifer is right, after all. Maybe God’s way is just bondage to a tyrant.” So instead, God said, “Lucifer, you think you are so great, so wise, and so powerful that you can choose your own way apart from Me. I hereby give you permission to pursue your course until the entire universe fully sees the consequences of your choice. You will find that the way you have chosen leads only to suffering and death. I will not defeat you by My power. Your own choices will defeat you. In the end, you and all of creation will see that the weakest, most foolish and ignorant child who chooses My ways will be happier and more secure and yes, even more powerful than anyone who chooses your ways of selfish rebellion. In fact, as great and as powerful as you are, Lucifer, your ultimate defeat will come through the weakness of human vessels who have chosen My ways.”

Lucifer laughed then, but now, as Satan the adversary, he isn’t laughing. He was defeated by a frail human who stood firm in faith in His Father and refused to give in to temptation, throughout His life and even unto His death on the cross. Satan thought he had won, but to his horror, he saw the Father raise Jesus from the dead, set Him at His right hand, and give Him a name above every name! Now Satan is angry. He rages against the seed of Adam who defeated him. Jesus Christ, the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45), won the victory. Now He enforces it through His many-membered body. “...Death is swallowed up in victory... Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (vs 54, 57) “... Be wise in what is good, and innocent of evil. And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” (Rom. 16:19–20)

“Then those who feared YHWH spoke to one another, and YHWH gave attention and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear YHWH and who esteem His name. ‘They will be Mine,’ says YHWH of Hosts,

‘on the day that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him. So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who serves God and the one who does not serve Him. For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,’ says YHWH of Hosts, ‘so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. And you will tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,’ says YHWH of Hosts.” (Mal. 3:16–4:3) Judgment Day will settle the Great Controversy! All creation will finally see the good consequences of choosing God’s ways, as well as the terrible consequences of Satan’s choice.

“Therefore the woman ought to have authority on her head, because of the angels.” (1 Cor. 11:10) “... that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies.” (angelic principalities – Eph. 3:10) “For God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle [theater] to the world, both to angels and to men.” (1 Cor. 4:9) “... these things which now have been announced to you ... things into which the angels long to look.” (1 Peter 1:12) Eternity cannot accomplish this task! The angles and demons are longing to see the resolution of the Great Controversy. Only time can show whether God’s ways are best or if Satan can overthrow it all and cause God to slink away in defeat. Time will indeed demonstrate to the universe that a weak child walking in service to the King is stronger, wiser, happier, and more secure than all the hoards of hell. *That is God’s Plan of the Ages, His purpose for time.*

Now that we've gotten past that little misunderstanding of God's Plan of the Ages, let's take a look at what Paul is saying in Ephesians. He talks about the revelation of a mystery, about an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, about summing up all things in Christ, about bringing to light the administration of this mystery, and so on. But He specifically (3:4–6) defines the mystery to be that the Gentiles (pagans) are now fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. That is a big clue. Back in the previous chapter, He talked about “breaking down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity... that He might make the two [Jews and pagans] into one new man...” That is the same thing. Does it remind you of the mystery he talked about in Colossians 1? “... to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles [pagans], which is Christ in you [yes, even you pagans], the hope of glory. And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man [Jews and pagans alike] complete in Christ.” (vs 27–29)

Let's see if we can put it together. God wanted a companion worthy of Himself, one upon whom He could lavish His own love, for He is love and love must have His beloved. From eternity, He had a plan, but this plan involved one who would love Him by choice – therefore it needed time for change, growth, and making choices. Thus I call it God's Plan of the Ages, His plan for time. His plan was to express Himself (as Jesus) into a new, created realm called time. Within this realm He would create a perfect but immature man, who by growth, discipline, failures and consequences, struggle and suffering would mature into a many-membered perfect body for Jesus the head, worthy to take back to the Father in His eternity as His ideal companion, His 'Bride.'

But how was this new man ever going to learn important things like how to love righteousness and hate evil? How in a perfect world would he learn faithfulness, steadfastness, endurance, patience, unconditional love, or all the other aspects of God's own character? No problem! That Great Controversy in the heavenlies now comes to earth!

The first part of God's Plan of the Ages was to allow sin to enter His perfect world. With sin comes division, enmity, and strife, because we were created in God's pure and perfect image, yet now we also have the stamp of sin within. This creates a constant struggle within us. Yes, this struggle is the Jew and the pagan within, fighting for control (lordship, kingship). The struggle is part of the process, designed by God to bring us into the Kingdom and to mature us in the "unity of the faith." (Eph. 4:13) The law was given to help us in our struggle, so that whenever we think we can win, the law comes along and condemns us, until we finally give up and come back to Christ. Note that it doesn't matter whether the Jew within (law) is winning or the pagan within (lawlessness) is winning, the struggle goes on until we return into Christ. Then and only then, "There is neither Jew nor Greek [pagan]; there is neither slave nor free; there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28)

That is the Kingdom. That is God's "... Plan of the Ages, which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him." (Eph. 3:11-12) When the battle is over and the victory is won, and Jesus Christ is truly Lord and King in us, then God's Plan of the Ages is fulfilled in us, and God's ever-growing and maturing companion, His beloved, His Son upon whom He chooses to lavish His love, has one more member worthy to bear His name. Then we are one member closer to the time when Jesus will return for His perfected Bride. (Rev. 19:7 ff)

“For a Child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us, and the government [Kingship] will rest upon His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government [Kingdom]... with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of YHWH of Hosts will accomplish this.” (Isa. 9:6–7)

A shortsighted and immature theology taught us that “When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound and time shall be no more... When His chosen ones shall gather to their home beyond the skies... When all of life is over and our work on earth is done, when the roll is called up yonder I’ll be there.” (James M. Black, 1893)

No, no, no! Time doesn’t end at the last trumpet! Our home in the ages to come is not beyond the skies! And our life and work on earth is certainly not done when Jesus comes for His Bride! No, it is just begun! Read Revelation 21 and 22, which is all after the last trumpet. It speaks of the renewed heavens and renewed earth, the tabernacle of God among men, and “He shall dwell among them, and wipe away every tear from their eyes...” It speaks of the overcomer being God’s son, but the cowardly and unbelieving and immoral and all liars having their part in the lake of fire and brimstone, the second death. It speaks of the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven to the earth, with no temple, no sun and no moon but the Lamb, and nations walking by the light of the Lamb, bringing their glory and honor into the city. It speaks of the curse being broken and of the bond-servants of the Lord serving Him, and seeing His face, and reigning with Him forever and ever. And it speaks of our mission: “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come!’ Let everyone who is thirsty come. Let everyone who wishes take the water of life without cost.” (Rev. 22:17)

This and many other passages confirm that the ages of time are really just beginning at the last trumpet.

This age of sin which seems so big and all-consuming is but a brief (though necessary) parenthesis in God's awesome Plan of the Ages. In this age of sin, God is choosing, calling, justifying, purifying, and glorifying a many-membered body as a Bride for Jesus. She is called the church, "purchased from among men as firstfruits to God and to the Lamb." (Rev. 14:4) She is a very small number chosen out from the multitudes of sin-bound humanity racing toward torment in hell.

But in the ages to come, we are to be on display, revealing to all creation the riches of God's grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:8) In this age, God's focus is on the Bride, purifying her and preparing her to rule and reign with Him. But in the ages to come "... the mountain [kingdom, government] of the house of YHWH [the church] shall be established as the chief of the mountains [other governments or kingdoms]. It will be raised above the hills [municipalities], and the peoples will stream to it. And many nations will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of YHWH... that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths.' For from Zion [the children of God] will go forth the law, even the word of YHWH from [the new] Jerusalem [the Bride of Christ]. And He will judge between many peoples and render decisions for mighty, distant nations. They will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they train for war. And each of them will sit under his vine and under his fig tree, with no one to make them afraid, for the mouth of YHWH of Hosts has spoken... As for you, tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion [the Bride of Christ], to you it will come: even the former dominion [Gen. 1:28] will come, the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem." (Mic. 4:1 ff)

This Plan of the Ages is so grand, so awesome in scope, so incredibly vast and all-encompassing, that our minds can hardly connect. Our entire lifespan, nay, all of recorded history is but a dot on the page of a fifty volume encyclopedia, in comparison to the ages of time God has prepared to complete His plan. It is beyond our understanding; truly "...exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think..." (Eph. 3:20) Yet the Scriptures give us glimpses here and there.

"[The Father] delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son... And He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or authorities – all things have been created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He also is head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have preeminence in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross..." (Col. 1:13–20) Yes, all things. The Bride was just the first-fruits. In the ages to come, the Spirit and the Bride will work together reconciling all the rest of humanity back to God – even those in hell (when their punishment is paid), for by His sacrificial death on the cross, He won the keys of death and hell. (Rev. 1:18)

"For from Him, and through Him, and unto Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen." (Rom. 11:36) This is God's Plan of the Ages, His purpose for the grand scope of time. When this age of sin is over, He will put "the Last Adam" back on track to fulfill His original (Gen. 1:28) mandate, for God cannot fail in any of His plans and purposes. "For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable." (Rom. 11:29)

He Is Able!

It is a false humility that says: “I’m just not good enough (or worthy, or capable, or wise enough) for God to use me in His Kingdom.” Please notice I called that false humility. True humility is submissive, teachable, meek, eager to please and to do one’s best to obey the Master and to give Him the glory, with no focus on self, whether there is great ability or none. The result of true humility is a boldness to do whatever God leads, because our own personal abilities and reputations are not at stake – they’re simply not an issue. Ours is but to obey; results are up to God.

But the false humility has not yet learned to take the focus off self. This can be a real stumbling block, even though there are a zillion promises in Scripture telling us that our lack of ability is not a problem to God. In fact, our greatest strengths and abilities may be only a liability to Him, while in our weakness and foolishness, He is shown to be strong. For example, “God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise...” (1 Cor. 1:20–2:5) and “... My grace is sufficient for you, for [My] power is perfected in [your] weakness...” (2 Cor. 12:9)

We are told to “... Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” (Phil. 2:12–13) We may work our guts out, pay the ultimate price, or fail miserably (in the world’s eyes), but we still do it in quiet confidence that, “... God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.” (2 Cor. 9:8) For God is “... able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or imagine...” (Eph. 3:20) This is not rocket science. It’s a simple matter of, “Do I believe God’s Word, His promise, or do I not?”

One of my favorites (of many) is the apostle Paul's benediction: "Now may the God of Peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete [perfect] without blame [righteous] at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He will also bring it to pass!" (1 Thess. 5:23–24) That's a promise, and again I ask, "Do I believe it, or not?" This is, after all, a walk by faith, and "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." (Rom. 14:23)

When Jesus returns for His Bride, He will find her pure and perfect. "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His Bride has made herself ready. And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." (Rev. 19:7–8) From that passage alone it sounds like it will be our righteous deeds and endurance through suffering that will purify us for our wedding with the Lamb. But that is only half true. The other half is important. "... Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be blameless." (Eph. 5:25–27) Again, He is doing it. He is able. He is faithful. He has all power and authority. He will bring it to pass.

Yes, it is our righteous deeds and our endurance and patience through suffering that purifies us and prepares us to be that spotless Bride. And yes, it is actually our Lord Jesus Christ Himself doing the work in and through us. If it were not so, we would fail miserably, but because it is so, we cannot fail. For He "... is able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless [faultless, sinless] with great joy." (Jude 24) So, what is our job here? Believe it. Delight in it. Walk in it. Trust in His faithfulness.

Let's take a quick tour through Paul's Epistles to Timothy, as they illustrate this dual responsibility which seems so much like a paradox. Timothy was zealous, but aware of his own youthful ignorance and lack of preaching skill. So the apostle Paul wrote to him as a father, encouraging him: "First of all, I urge that entreaties and prayers be made on behalf of all... that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness... This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all..." (1 Tim. 2:1-6) All through both Epistles to Timothy Paul goes on like this, exhorting and reproving. "... let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe... Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the board of elders. Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and those who hear you." (1 Tim. 4:12-16) "Now flee youthful lusts. Pursue after righteousness, faith, love, and peace with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. The Lord's bondservant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition..." (2 Tim. 2:22-25) "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead according to His appearing and His Kingdom; preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." (2 Tim. 4:1-2)

Then after all that stern fatherly exhortation, it is like Paul sighs softly and says, “I fought the good fight and finished the course. I kept the faith. In the future there is laid up for me the crown of the righteousness [of Christ], which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing... The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly Kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” (vs 7–8, 18) Remember that, young Timothy. Jesus is able. He will do it. He will deliver me from every evil deed. He will bring me safely to His heavenly Kingdom.

Yes, Timothy, I know your sincere faith. So “... I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me as His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from before the times of the ages, but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that **He is able** to guard that which I have entrusted to Him until that day.” (2 Tim. 1:6–12)

He is able, my young brother in Christ. Don't let your youthful inexperience slow you down. Be bold to speak whatever God's Spirit gives you. Do your best, give your utmost, lay your all at His feet. Then trust Him! He will make up what lacks and bring you, perfect, before Himself on that day.

Are you also looking forward to that “crown of the righteousness?” (2 Tim. 4:8) You know, don’t you, that we are not talking about a golden crown of honor for us to put on our heads so everyone will see that we ‘made it.’ No, this crown refers to the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus: Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. All who love His appearing, all who long to see Him just as He is, “Everyone who has this hope fixed on Him, purifies himself, just as He is pure.” (1 Jn. 3:3) We haven’t achieved it yet; we haven’t yet obtained that prize, but we will! As with Paul, God has reserved for us the highest prize of all: the crown of His righteousness, perfectly covering us, with no downward pull of sin, no war against the self nature, and no fleshly lusts to dim its beauty. That is what we long to wear, as He promised!

Psalm 23

The twenty-third Psalm ranks among the finest; most beautiful, poetic, and spiritually uplifting; most encouraging, comforting, and inspiring; and most God-honoring and faith-building words ever penned. The psalmist’s heart flowed as one with the heart of God, and the inspired words that came forth give proof that King David was indeed a “man after God’s own heart.” (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22)

The twenty-third Psalm is also prophetic preparation for the battles of the end times. I see it as the clearest statement in the entire Old Testament of what it means to walk in God’s Kingdom. Please bear in mind that the Children of Israel had lost the Kingdom by this time. God’s original intent was to be their only King, a true theocracy, and to rule them through prophets and judges like Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Elisha, Gideon, and Samuel. Their job was not to be king; it was only to relay to the people the word of God, their true King.

When the people came to Samuel saying, "... Appoint us a king to judge us like all the nations." God informed Samuel, "... They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being King over them." (1 Sam. 8:5,7)

"So He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul." (Ps. 106:15) Yeah, they had a king, but they lost the Kingdom, and it was only a short time before nearly every human king became their oppressor, leading them into sin and putting them into bondage and slavery, just as Samuel had prophesied. (1 Sam. 8:10-18)

King David was just as human as the rest. He led Israel to sin and brought them into bondage and judgment just like all the others. As I said before, whenever you have merely external laws instead of each person being led by the Holy Spirit, you have a kingdom of man, which inevitably turns out sour and in opposition to the Kingdom of God. God allowed this for a reason: so we can learn wisdom! Look at King David. A man after God's own heart, David walked in the Kingdom of God more than any of the other Old Testament kings. Yet when he tried to rule over others, his enemies, his own people, his own family, even his own heart and fleshly desires, he failed miserably and got into all sorts of trouble.

Can we learn from King David in this Psalm both how to walk wholeheartedly in the Kingdom as a child of the King, and how not to try to rule over others as if we were their king?

The Lord is my shepherd. It starts right off with this battle for the lordship of my life. This is the entry into the Kingdom! If He is my shepherd, then I am His sheep, and I hear His voice and follow Him, and another I will not follow. (Jn. 10:3-5) But if I want Him for my shepherd, can I not also give my brother the freedom to do the same without my trying to usurp the Lord's authority over my brother? (Ouch!)

I shall not want. Here is the battle for my heart's desires. My shepherd provides all my needs. I refuse to lust after things which He has chosen not to provide, knowing that getting them could be harmful rather than beneficial.

He makes me lie down in green pastures. This is both the battle for my place, and the rest of faith, knowing that any place He puts me, no matter how difficult, is a green pasture. I lie down in spirit, waiting on Him and fully trusting Him to meet all my needs. I refuse to try to meet my needs in my own way; there is no ambition for glory or power in the Kingdom.

He leads me beside the quiet waters, giving me the streams of living water from His Word of Life. This is a faith-battle over the Word, you know. He has to lead you there. The quiet waters of His still, small voice run swift and deep, and without His leading, you will be swept away by your human understanding. "... When the Son of Man comes, will He find the faith in the earth?" (Lk. 18:8) Yes, He will, in us! But only if we follow His leading beside the quiet waters.

He restores my soul. My communication link with His Holy Spirit, so damaged by sin, is restored as He leads me by the quiet waters of His living Word. He also restores my communication with my own soul, opening my spiritual eyes to see myself as He sees me, both as I am and as I am becoming in Christ. This battle for the soul is won only when His Spirit rules as King over my soul, and through my soul, He rules over my fleshly passions and desires.

He guides me in the paths of righteousness. 'Faith versus works' again. The battle for faith becomes a battle for good deeds – righteous actions. Again, He is my guide, or all is lost. The Kingdom cannot be won by faith alone, for if my faith does not result in my actually walking those paths, doing those righteous deeds, then it is not He who is guiding me.

For His name's sake. Ahh! Not for my sake or my glory. I am only a witness for Him, to display His light and glory in a dark, bleak world. When I am walking along His paths of righteousness, His name is vindicated, and His awesome wisdom and goodness are exhibited through me. This is the battle for the glory, which all belongs only to Him, but which our human nature wants so desperately to steal.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and I will, for He leads me there. This is the battle against that flesh nature, including the mind and will. “The mind set on the flesh is death...” (Rom. 8:6) “...If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross [die to the self-nature], and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his [soul] life shall lose it, but whoever loses his [soul] life for My sake shall find it.” (Matt. 16:24–25) I must go through the valley of the shadow of death, the crucifixion of my flesh nature, for flesh and blood shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. But as I walk there:

I fear no evil, for Thou art with me. We have been buried with Him in baptism (Col. 2:12) and raised up in Him to walk in new life. (Rom. 6:4) Jesus has walked this way before, and He promised to never leave us or forsake us. (Deut. 31:6–8; Josh. 1:5; 1 Kings 8:57; Heb. 13:5) From now on in the Kingdom we reverence and fear Him and Him alone; with Him by our side we can no longer fear evil, harm, any human being, or any circumstance.

Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me. His rod of discipline is not a threat any longer – it’s a comfort. “... He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness.” (Heb. 12:10) His staff of guidance is no longer a theory or a future promise – it too is a constant comfort in this Kingdom walk. The sons of God are led by the Spirit of God. (Rom. 8:14)

Thou dost prepare a table before me. Lavish and bountiful, the Bread of Life and the Living Waters of the Spirit nourish me in the Kingdom, so that wherever I go I am energetic, strong, and eager to follow the King. Indeed, in following the King I am fed, for “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work.” (Jn. 4:34)

In the presence of my enemies. The very things which feed me, confront and anger the enemies of the King. The blessings of the Kingdom appear as a curse to the wicked. Acts of righteousness expose and vanquish the deeds of evil, just as light exposes the corruption and drives away the darkness.

Thou hast anointed my head with oil, yes, the precious oil of the Holy Spirit, dripping down over my countenance and flowing off the hem of my garment. (Ps. 133:2) “... The anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but His anointing teaches you about all things...” (1 Jn. 2:27; Jn. 14:26)

My cup overflows with love, joy, peace, understanding, knowledge, wisdom, grace, faith, and every other blessing to be found in the anointing of the Holy Spirit, which is to say, every blessing that can ever be – “exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or imagine...” (Eph. 3:20)

Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me. They’ll catch me, too, and surround me, hold me up, cover me, and fill me, because they are what the Kingdom is made of and I’m walking in it continually as I walk with the King!

All the days of my life. This is not talking about some future by ‘n by, my friends! This is here and now, starting this minute, for the rest of my life. “And this is eternal life, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ [the King] whom Thou hast sent.” (Jn. 17:3; 1 Jn. 5:20)

And I will dwell in the house of YHWH. I will dwell in the secret place of the Most High; I will continually abide in the shadow of the Almighty; I will say to YHWH, “My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!” (Ps. 91:1–2, another Kingdom Psalm! Go through it like this sometime.) In the Kingdom, I am His dwelling place and He is mine.

Forever. Literally “for length of days,” all my days, and on into the fullness of the Kingdom. Forever is a time word. It starts right now and extends throughout all the ages of time.

Kingdom Principles

Well, these theological theories are all very fine and scriptural and all, but is it actually possible to walk in the Kingdom, to be led continually by the Holy Spirit of God, to truthfully rejoice in all things (even suffering), to pray without ceasing, to love with the love that never fails (bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, and enduring all things – 1 Cor. 13:7), to be holy and He is holy? (1 Peter 1:16)

No. (Sigh.) Believe me, I’ve tried. At one time, I thought it really might be possible. But at this point in my life, I just can’t see it. Not in this age of sin. Not with our own sin nature constantly pulling down on us. Not until Satan is bound and thrown into the pit. I don’t think anyone (except Jesus Christ Himself) has ever done it, and no one will ’til He returns. Even the apostle Paul, with all the zeal he had, all the good works he did, and all the sufferings he went through, never achieved it. If you don’t believe me, read Romans 7, or better yet, Philippians 3:12–13, “Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet...”

So what's the use? If the great apostle Paul never made it, what hope have I? I may as well just lay back, trust Jesus to do it for me, and hang on by my fingernails 'til the rapture... Hmm. This is starting to sound a tad bleak. Maybe I should go back to finish that Philippians passage: "... but one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect [mature, complete] have this [same] attitude... Brethren, join in following my example..." (vs 13-17)

Did you catch that? Forget what lies behind! Forget what everyone else ever did or failed to do. Follow Paul's example of pressing on toward the goal: the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. It doesn't matter that no one else ever 'made it.' Jesus hasn't come back for His Bride yet, either! But when He does, He will have a pure and spotless Bride, and it could be very soon! That is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus: to be able to stand without shame before Him at His appearing and hear those incredible words: "Well done, good and faithful servant... enter into the joy of your Lord!" (Matt. 25:23)

One of the worst problems a man can have is remaining defeated by past sins. This is what Jesus was dealing with in John 8. Look at what He told the woman caught in adultery: "... Neither do I condemn you; go your way; from now on sin no more." (vs 11) Was He condoning adultery? Not a chance! Allow me to paraphrase and interpolate into the story a little. "... Woman, you sinned and got caught. Now you've been condemned, publicly shamed, and brought here for stoning (which, frankly, you deserve almost as much as your black-hearted accusers). I think you now see – the end of that road is death! So I forgive you. I lift you up above that condemnation and set your feet back on the right road, the Kingdom Highway. Walk on it and don't look back! Sin no more!"

“... Truly I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin... If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.” (vs 34 and 36) We understand the guilt and condemnation of sin. We’ve all ‘been there, done that.’ But do we understand our incredible freedom in Christ?

There is no condemnation in the Kingdom! (Rom. 8:1) Every one of us has slipped and fallen off the King’s Highway. Most of us rather recently. Some of us even this very day. So – deal with it already. Repent of it, confess it, make it right, accept the forgiveness and cleansing that was bought and paid for by Jesus two thousand years ago, get back on the highway, and don’t look back. Press on for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

My wife and I recently watched the Winter Olympics. We enjoyed the pairs ice skating competition. One of the couples took a rather major fall early in their program. They quickly got up and went on, but I suspected that would mean the end of any chance to win. Sure enough, they skated as if they were already defeated. There was a sadness throughout their skating. They continued making little mistakes, even in things they normally were very good at.

But there was another pair who also took a major fall early in their program. They also picked themselves up and went on – but with a difference. They acted as if now they had nothing left to lose and everything to win, so they put the fall behind them and skated in all-out abandon – with freedom, joy, and brilliance – it was utterly indescribable! They poured themselves into their art with a wholehearted exuberance that was catching. Sure enough, it caught the hearts of the judges, who gave them exceedingly high marks (higher even than the mandatory deduction for the fall seemed to allow), actually putting them into first place in the competition.

That is the Kingdom! We've all sinned. We all deserve death. So we've really nothing left to lose and everything to gain by putting it all behind us and stepping out onto the King's Highway, wholeheartedly trusting in His grace. Just like to the woman caught in adultery, Jesus says to us, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and sin no more! Don't look back on the failures. Press on for the prize! Walk the King's Highway, the way of truth and righteousness. Keep your focus on Me and My strength and perfection, not on yourself and your weakness and failures. And when the suffering comes, the discipline, the testing, endure it all with joy! I'm dealing with you as a son, and what son is there that the father does not discipline? With a little testing, that tiny seed of faith I gave you will soon be grown into a mighty oak tree which nothing in earth or hell can uproot."

Hebrews 12 – another Kingdom chapter! "... Let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (vs 1–2)

God could have made a world without bugs and slugs. He could have blocked sin from ever entering His beautiful and perfect creation. He could have stopped Satan before Eve ever fell to temptation. He could have given us instant maturity. He could have given us wings. He could have made us as powerful as the mightiest angels. He could have made us as beautiful as Lucifer himself. He could have... ahh nuts.

Instead, He made us weak, ignorant, naïve, and very, very vulnerable, and He put us in a world full of trials and temptations. And bugs. Why?

“Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered; and having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation.” (Heb. 5:8–9) “But now we do not yet see all things subjected to Him, but we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for every one. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation [Jesus] through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren... For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted... There remains therefore a Sabbath Rest for the people of God... Let us therefore be diligent to enter that Rest... For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit... able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weakness, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.” (selected parts of Heb. 2:8 – 4:16)

He came down so low to lift us up so high! He became as the weakest among us, not just to tell us the way to the Father, but to actually demonstrate for us the way back to the Father.

Jesus was eternal, almighty God! He had it all! Yet He laid aside His divinity, humbled Himself, and became completely human, in all our weaknesses and ignorance (yet without sin). He started 'from scratch' as a baby. He had to learn to speak and walk and read and discover His little world just like the rest of us. He traveled the same road of temptation, trials, and suffering. He, too, had to cope with bugs and slugs! He had no advantages except this: He did not inherit Adam's original sin. Thus early in life (by the age of twelve – Luke 2:40–52), He was able to develop a close relationship with His Father in heaven. He learned what it was like to grow, to change, to mature. He spent much time in prayer / communion with His Father so that He would gain true wisdom and always be pleasing to His Father. He waited to begin His ministry until He received the filling of the Holy Spirit, coming like a dove. (Jn. 1:32 ff) From then on, He only said what He heard the Father say, and He only did what He saw the Father doing. (Jn. 4:34; 5:17–30 ff) In the process, He suffered more than us all, and even died at the hands of wicked men. Why? How could a loving God ever allow His own Son to suffer so?

You can say, "He suffered and died to save us from our sin so we could go to heaven." You would be absolutely correct. But if that was the only purpose, why didn't God just keep us from sin? Then Jesus would not have had to die! Now we're back to God's Plan of the Ages: just as Jesus learned obedience through the things that He suffered, so must we. He wanted us to experience the worst, so we could appreciate the best. We must go through the darkness to appreciate the light. We must be tempted in order to learn endurance, patience, steadfastness, faithfulness. We must struggle, and fight, and be confronted and condemned before we can possibly appreciate the incredible peace that Jesus bought for us when He "abolished in His flesh the enmity." (Eph. 2:15)

God's plan is for us to walk in Jesus' footsteps. He went before us to show us the way. After His death, God lifted Him from hell to the very highest place, ever living to intercede for us at the Father's right hand. "Hence also He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them." (Heb. 7:25) He sends His Spirit to guide us: "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper that He may be with you forever; that is, the [Holy] Spirit of Truth... you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will see Me no longer, but you will see me; because I live, you shall live also. In that day, you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me... and I will love him and disclose Myself to him." (Jn. 14:16–21)

This is the Kingdom. The King has chosen to come to us, live in us and enable us to live in Him, rule through us, and bring us up to the Father. In the process, He matures us, disciplines us, and makes us a worthy son of Father God as a part of the many-membered Bride of Christ.

He develops in each one of us a 'life message,' a ministry, a place to rule with Him in His Kingdom. On those of us who choose to walk with Him in His Kingdom, He reveals His mercy and infinite love, and displays his grace and all the beauty of His character. But even on those who harden their hearts and choose the torments of hell over submission to His Lordship, He still reveals His longsuffering patience and His ultimate justice and awesome holiness, righteousness, and truth. They will receive in full that which they have chosen, so all creation can see that God is not mocked! We each shall reap in full measure what we sow, either to the flesh (reaping corruption) or to the Spirit (reaping life). (Gal. 6:7–8)

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (Eph. 2:4–7)

Where are you? Are you seated with Christ in heavenly places? Absolutely! If God has started anything in you at all, even to bending your heart to want His Kingdom, “... I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 1:6) That is a promise! So, what do we have to do? Well, it starts by just believing His promises. This is a walk by faith, after all. For any more than that, don’t come to me – ask Him.

You may complain, “I already asked Him. But He didn’t answer.” Well, ask and keep on asking; seek and keep on seeking; knock and keep on knocking. He is God. He will answer when and how He wants to. As C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Chronicles of Narnia*: “He is not a tame lion, you know.”

I can tell you some of the ways He answered me, and others can do the same, but it is only remotely possible that He will do the same for you. He takes delight in our differences, and it is for sure that He treats each of us as an individual.

All I know is that for me, He has answered me well enough, often enough, and powerfully enough, that there can no longer be any question of doubt in my mind. He is my Lord and Master, my awesome sovereign King, and I could never turn back. I am committed to the Kingdom, to hearing His voice as best as I can and to obeying Him as rapidly and as well as I can, and I trust Him for the results. I have His promise. I determine to believe it. I claim it and will never let it go.

“I [Jesus] am the Good Shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And I have other sheep [that’s us], who are not of this [Jewish] fold; I must bring them also, and they [too] shall hear My voice; And [when I have broken down the barrier of the dividing wall by abolishing in My flesh the enmity] they [both Jews and pagans] shall become one flock, with one Shepherd... My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them. They shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand.” (Jn. 10:14–16, 27–28)

That is the Kingdom!

Women in the Kingdom

“... I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression. But women shall be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith, love, and sanctity with self-restraint.” (1 Tim. 2:12–15) “Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the law also says. And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper [a shame] for a woman to speak in church.” (1 Cor. 14:34–35) “Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the Word of God may not be hindered.” (Titus 2:3–5) Hmm – but what about:

“... Every woman who has her head uncovered while [publicly] praying or prophesying disgraces her head...” (1 Cor. 11:5) “This man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses.” (Acts 21:9) “There was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, ...she never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers.” (Lk. 2:36–37) “And it shall be in the last days, God says, that I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even upon My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit, and they shall prophesy.” (Acts 2:17–18, quoted from Joel 2:28–29) And there are other examples of prophetesses in the Old Testament such as Exodus 15:20, Judges 4:4, and 2 Kings 22:14–15.

It would seem that we have a bit of a conflict. On the one hand women are basically told to ‘shut up and siddown’ – on the other hand they are allowed to publicly pray and even prophesy. Can this be resolved in the Kingdom?

Believing as I do that the Word of God is wholly inspired and inerrant as the true words of the one true God who cannot lie or make the slightest mistake, I know it can be resolved. Please hear my proposed resolution and see if the Lord will confirm any of it to your heart. Other people try to resolve it in other ways, and I know that there is some speculation here, but this way seems to me to best harmonize all the Scriptures.

God created Adam in His own image and called all of His creation “very good.” (Gen. 1:26, 31) God put Adam in the Garden of Eden, commanded him to cultivate it and take dominion, and gave him that one famous negative command, “Don’t eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” (2:15–17)

Later, God said, “It’s not good for man to be alone; I will make a helper suitable for him.” (vs 18) Adam then named all the animals, but didn’t find any suitable helpers, so God put him to sleep and took out one of his ‘ribs,’ from which He fashioned a woman to be his wife. (2:18–25) So familiar we slip right past some elements crucial to our discussion.

First, note that God (1:26) is plural. “Let us make man in our image...” yet we know from all the rest of Scripture that He is one God – indeed, the very essence of oneness. “Hear O Israel! Jehovah is our God, Jehovah is One!” (Deut. 6:4) We explain that (I believe correctly) by saying that God is so big, so vast in His many-splendored, many-faceted nature, that it takes at least three ‘persons’ to comprehend Him: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, yet these three are perfectly, in essence and glory, one God. Three in one, one in three – the Trinity. This is consistent throughout Scripture and rarely disputed. But then this Trinity creates man in His (Their) image! Some explain this by saying that we also are trinity: body, soul, and spirit, and I do not argue that; we are. But that explanation doesn’t totally satisfy me.

What about the woman? Is she less fully in the image of God since she came from man later, after man was created in God’s image? Is that why Paul tells Timothy that the woman should keep quiet? And what about Peter, who tells us to love our wives “in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman, and grant her honor as a fellow-heir [equally recipient] of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” ? (1 Peter 3:7) Do these passages (and others like them) imply that the woman was created as a lesser being, somehow less important or inferior? I cannot believe that! Woman are “fellow-heirs of the grace of life,” not second-class citizens of the Kingdom. Rather, I suspect that we do not fully understand some things about God’s nature. (Duh!)

I have come to believe that God's nature has dominant male characteristics and subordinate female characteristics. His female aspects tend to be hidden by their very nature so that we know very little about them. I believe that Adam was first created with similar strong dominant male and weaker subordinate female natures, so that he was fully in God's image as both male and female in one person (1:26), at least before God separated him into Adam and Eve. (2:22)

The separation is unique to the creation story. Everything except man, God made in pairs from nothing, by the word of His power. But He made one man from the dust of the ground and breathed Himself (the Breath of Life, His own Spirit) into the man, and thus "man became a living soul." (2:7) Herein is the problem. Adam wanted to rule the earth, for that is how God made him, and that is the male nature. (1:28) But if that's all he does, how will he ever develop his own female nature to become submissive, subordinate to God? The characteristics which he needs to learn are hidden, obscured by their very nature. God did not want Adam to become another Lucifer, whose strong male nature turned into pride and rebellion. To solve this problem God separated Adam – into Adam and Eve.

I believe that this was a 'trinity' separation: physical, mental and emotional, and spiritual. (Please bear in mind that this is speculation – God does not tell us how He did it.) My theory says that Adam wound up with most of the dominant strong male characteristics, and his weaker female side was to a great degree removed, leaving him incomplete in all three realms. Eve wound up with those previously hidden weaker submissive female characteristics *as dominant within her*, leaving her also lacking in wholeness in all three realms. Thus, a man can only be wholly in God's image when he, "... shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they both shall become one flesh." (2:24)

A clue which tends to back up this theory is contained in the word translated 'rib' which God took out of Adam to make Eve. It comes from a word which also means chamber or womb, implying that it was the female plumbing that God used to make Eve. Thus the physical differences between men and women may simply be a result of their separation. Eve's physical differences do not make her any less in God's image than Adam. Both of them wound up missing something!

Another clue is found in Jesus' response to the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection. He said, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures or the power of God. The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage; for neither can they die any more, for they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection." (Matt. 22:29 ff; Lk. 20:35 ff) The implication here is that when we are changed into our resurrection bodies we will all, male and female alike, become "sons of God," and will all be male like the angels, who are always referred to in Scripture in the male gender. Does this remind you of Adam at creation, before he was separated into Adam and Eve? It should; in Luke 3:38, Adam is called the son of God!

Don't forget that because the angels (and we, after the resurrection) won't die, there will be no more need to procreate to perpetuate the species. So maybe rather than calling the angels 'male gender' we should call them 'sexless'. Yet Scripture refers to them as male, and I think for good reason. Ever since God breathed into Adam the breath of life and Adam became a 'living soul' there have been three realms in this space-time universe: the physical realm, the soul realm, and the spirit realm. We tend to focus on the differences in the physical realm because that is the easiest for us to see.

But the differences are far more than physical. The mental and emotional soul differences are huge. The male logic is balanced by the famous female intuition; the male bold initiative is balanced by the female cautious investigation, and so on. We really need each other to be a balanced person. It takes a very special gift from God to remain mentally and emotionally balanced without a spouse. There are some who are called to remain single. God promises to make up the difference for them Himself, so they will not need an earthly spouse. But that is the exception, not the rule given in Genesis 2:18 and 24.

Then comes the spiritual differences. Yes, I believe they are at least as significant as the others. In general (there are many variations) the male has as dominant within him the decisive, authoritative, bold, ruling, leading, teaching, guiding, protecting, creating, 'fathering' spirit. The female has as dominant within her the submissive, meek, obedient, gentle, nurturing, caring, learning, empathetic, 'mothering' spirit as the "weaker vessel." (1 Peter 3:7) However, both men and women also have sub-dominant, recessive characteristics of the opposite gender. And all of this may be perverted by the sin nature. We must be careful to be who God made us and not let our recessive or perverted characteristics rule us.

God has all these aspects in perfect balance within His character. Because they are in balance, God has none of the negative aspects which always result from an imbalance of any good attribute. Stop and think. When unbalanced, ruling becomes dominating; authoritative becomes tyrannical; teaching becomes brainwashing; guiding becomes coercion; submissive becomes cringing and cowardly; supportive becomes manipulative; gentle becomes weak, milquetoast; obedience becomes slavish; and meek and humble become spineless, groveling, fearful, and lacking in initiative.

I believe this is actually behind what the apostle Paul is saying. (1 Tim. 2; 1 Cor. 14) We must be what we were created to be in harmony and balance with our spouse. A man should not be weak, indecisive, cowardly, and slavish to his wife, and his wife should not try to dominate, coerce, or manipulate her husband. Instead, the husband should aim to portray the male leadership attributes of God the Father toward his wife, and his wife should aim to portray the female supportive and obedient attributes of God the Son toward her husband, that both may grow in the knowledge of God. I believe it dishonors our Creator if we reverse these roles. Being made in His image, we shine with the character of God, each in his or her own way.

So far, so good, but what about the Kingdom? During His life on earth, Jesus (who never married) portrayed both roles! (e.g. Matt. 28:18; Jn. 8:28) He was walking in the Kingdom!

“... You are all sons of God [like Adam was before the separation] through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is therefore neither Jew nor Greek [pagan], there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:26–28)

“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God [sons like Adam before the separation]... the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God... and not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption [restoration to our original design] of our body.” (Rom. 8:14, 19, 23) When our bodies are fully redeemed and restored to wholeness, completeness, in sinless perfection, then we finally will be able to fulfill our original mandate to rule the earth, in glorified bodies ruled by the Holy Spirit.

Yes, you women of the Kingdom, you too are called to be sons of God, by virtue of the Spirit which is in you and by which you are led, the Holy Spirit, which is a male-dominant spirit. In accord with God's purpose at the separation, you must learn how to do that from us men, by being submissive, teachable, supportive without being manipulative, and not seeking to dominate the men God places over you.

The desire to dominate is a part of the 'female curse' given by God to Eve, a result of the original sin, and now a part of the female fallen nature. "... Yet your desire [to dominate] shall be for [against] your husband, and he shall rule over [dominate] you." (Gen. 3:16) It must be not you but the Holy Spirit within you who rises up and leads you to act above and beyond your female nature and thus to accomplish mighty acts in the Kingdom, to pray and prophesy with the "proper authority" (the Holy Spirit) on your head (1 Cor. 11:5), to teach the principles of the Kingdom (especially to the younger women and your own children, but also to anyone whom the Spirit leads you to teach) (Titus 2:3-4), and even to judge (discern the truth and apply the law). (Judg. 4:4)

And us men? Well, guess what? We are called into the Kingdom a little differently. We are called to be the Bride of Christ. (Rev. 19:7) We are called to sit at Jesus' feet and learn from Him, for He is gentle and humble in heart. (Matt. 11:29) That's easy for women – it's their dominant nature – but how can we men do that? By loving our wives as our own flesh, nourishing her and cherishing her, (Eph. 5:25-29) dwelling with her in understanding, (1 Peter 3:7) and submitting ourselves to each other in the reverent fear of Christ. (Eph. 5:21) We men have great need of learning the humility, meekness, teachableness, empathy, sensitivity to God's Spirit, and so on, which you women take for granted because it is part of your dominant nature. We must learn from you.

I still have trouble with women preachers. It seems backwards from God's created order. When "women rule over men" (Isa. 3:12), it bothers me. But frankly, I would rather sit under a woman preacher who is filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking a true and living word from God, than sit under a male preacher who has taken control by his own knowledge and ambition and refuses to allow the Holy Spirit to lead His church. Do you notice the desire to dominate? That is the 'female curse!' I would tell that man: "God does not allow a woman to teach. You ought to go learn from your husband (Jesus Christ) at home!" The best preacher is the man who first learns what it means to be a Bride of Christ by sitting at His feet to learn from Him, and then speaks by His Spirit.

And to the woman who is led by the Holy Spirit to speak out in church, I am delighted to hear from the Lord through you. I submit to what He is saying and thank you for having the courage to voice it. Anyone led by that fallen female spirit should be ashamed to speak in church, but women should be eager to allow the (male) Holy Spirit of Jesus speak through them. So all you women who are learning to be sons of God in His Kingdom, I exhort you to eagerly claim all those male-oriented verses, like: "... Christ in you, the hope of glory. And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man [whether male or female] complete in Christ." (Col. 1:27-28)

Thus God's purpose in separating Adam into male and female bears fruit. We men can learn from our wives the subordinate characteristics of God's nature, and you women can learn from us men the dominant characteristics, so we all "... grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ... until we all attain to the unity of the faith, to a mature man [the many-membered body of Christ], to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (Eph. 4:15, 13)

Growing in the Kingdom

“... What is the Kingdom of God like, and to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his garden, and it grew and became a tree; and the birds of the air nested in its branches... It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of meal, until it was all leavened.” (Lk. 13:18–21, see also Matt. 13:31–33 and Mk. 4:30 ff)

“... The Kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the ground; and goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts up and grows – how, he himself does not know. The earth produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.” (Mk. 4:26–29)

The two great parables of the seed and the sower and of the wheat and tares in Matthew 13:1–30 are also given by Jesus as illustrations of the Kingdom. When the disciples questioned Jesus about these parables, His response began with (vs 11) “... To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it has not been granted.” Yes, the Kingdom of Heaven is filled with mysteries, which are only revealed to us who are His disciples.

What can we discover about the Kingdom from these parables? First, that the Kingdom grows slowly; it doesn't happen all at once. Second, that the Kingdom grows secretly, within us, with very little if any outward show. (Ref. Lk. 17:20–21) Third, that the Kingdom has a life all its own, which is not hindered by our lack of understanding it. Fourth, that there will be a definite time of harvest; the Kingdom will bear fruit. Those are obvious. I'm sure you understand them.

But there are a few things not so obvious here. Did you notice that the life of the Kingdom is a very different life-form, not at all like the sower or the one who gathers in the harvest? All the life of the Kingdom is contained in the seed, not in the farmer who sows it. He can plant it where it will get plenty of sun, water it, fertilize it, even pray over it, but if there is no life in the seed, it won't grow. Second, the harvest is of the same life-form that the seed was, both a very different life-form from the farmer. Third, what do we do with the harvest? We eat it! It becomes nourishment, literally life to our bodies. We must understand these principles to understand the Kingdom.

The seed of the Kingdom is the Word of God. (Lk. 8:11) It is "the word of the Kingdom." (Matt. 13:19) It has life within itself and is not dependent upon any outside influence for that life. "For the Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (Heb. 4:12)

Why does the Word of God have life in itself? Because it originates in Jesus, the source of life. John's Gospel brings this out: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." (6:63) Shortly following (vs 68) is Peter's famous confession: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

At the death of her brother Lazarus Jesus gave Martha an incredible revelation. "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. [!] Do you believe this?'" (11:25–26) It is not just that Jesus has this Kingdom life in Himself, though He does. More than that, Jesus is the life. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." (14:6)

“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 came into being through Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness; and the darkness does not overpower it.” (1:1–5) That pretty much sums it up. As the Word that spoke all creation into existence, Jesus, the Living Word, gave and continues to give life and light to all mankind.

“For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes... For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son to have life in Himself... Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds, to a resurrection of life, and those who committed the evil deeds, to a resurrection of judgement.” (5:21, 26, 28–29)

So the first step toward growing in the Kingdom is to “Let the Word of Christ dwell richly within you...” (Col. 3:16) so “that He might sanctify her [the church, the Bride], having cleansed her by the washing of water by the word.” (Eph. 5:26)

The Word of God, written in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible and ministered to our hearts by the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ Himself, is life, Kingdom life, and it brings life to all who allow themselves to be touched by it.

But there is another aspect here that we must understand. Just as the life of a plant is a different life-form from the life of the farmer, so the life of the Word is a different life-form from ours. When we eat the plant, we take its life within us, and it becomes our life. But we must keep eating to keep living, because we have no life within ourselves. We must have a constant source of life from without, or we will perish.

The Word of God, who is Jesus Christ, the way, the truth and the life, has life within Himself. He is a different life-form, the life of the Spirit, just as the plant is a different life-form from the farmer. We must continually feed on Him (Jn. 6:56 ff) and drink from Him (Jn. 7:37 ff) or we will (spiritually) die, because we have no spirit life within apart from His. John 15 illustrates this beautifully: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the Word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing... If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you." (vs 1-7)

From this parable, you can think of Jesus as the root stock from which you, the branches, get all your nourishment. Surely you can imagine what happens when you are broken off from the root stock! Yes, the Father can graft you back on again, but at what cost? How long does it take a newly grafted branch to heal and begin bearing fruit? God's obvious intent is that we always remain securely fastened to the root stock! Then and only then can we bear fruit for the Kingdom.

Note the trials and discipline that are hinted at in verse 2. Do you sometimes feel 'pruned?' Good! Rejoice! The Father is preparing you to bear more fruit!

One more analogy here you may have missed. Where does the fruit come from? Not the root stock. Not a bit! It all comes from the properly pruned and securely attached branches who are drawing their life from the root stock.

Jesus primarily disciplined just twelve during His earthly ministry. Then He sent them out to disciple others, and they “turned the world upside down.” (Acts 17:6 KJV) Of course Jesus could do it all, but He usually does His Kingdom work through us, so we will learn to walk in the Kingdom.

Abiding in Jesus by dwelling continually in His living Word is living in the Kingdom. It will result in bearing fruit for the Kingdom as surely as a healthy, growing vine produces grapes in season. Please note that what I talked about earlier (in Faith Versus Works) applies here as well. “Abide in Me” in verse 7 is equated to verses 10 and 12: “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love... This is My commandment, that you love one another. Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends, if you do what I command you.” Walking in the Kingdom is still good deeds done by faith, not just the faith itself. Never forget that the resurrection of life is given by Jesus to those who have done the good deeds, not to those who only said that they believed. (Jn. 5:29; see also Matt. 25:31–46)

Finally, please note that the harvest of the Kingdom must be the same life-form as the original seed. We tend to think of this harvest as those who get ‘saved’ by our testimony, but God takes a different perspective. The life of the Kingdom is the Word of God. So the harvest of the Kingdom is an increase in the Word of God. “So the Word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.” (Acts 19:20; see also 6:7 and 12:24) Semantics? I don’t think so. Being ‘saved’ isn’t walking in the Kingdom – it is just the first baby step. If you lead a thousand souls in the ‘sinner’s prayer’ and then walk off and leave ‘em, you haven’t yet reaped any harvest for the Kingdom! The great commission is not, “Go therefore and get people saved.” It is, “Go therefore and make disciples... teaching them to observe [do] all that I commanded you...” (Matt. 28:19–20)

In essence, we are to live with the life of Jesus Christ abiding in us and shining through us so as to reproduce His divine life-form in others. The Kingdom of God is a whole new life-form: the Word of God, which takes up residence within us and is reproduced through us to bear the harvest of an increase in God's Word in ourselves and others. Thus, a disciple is not just a believer – he is a follower, a doer. He both understands the ways of the Kingdom and walks in them. He loves the King enough to serve Him. His life displays the King's own life-form. It is 'faith versus works' all over again.

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My Word be which goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty [wasted], without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.” (Isa. 55:10–11)

That is the Kingdom.

The Evil One

“... God is opposed to [resists] the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you...” (James 4:6–8) “Be of sober spirit. Be on the alert. Your adversary the devil prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. And after you have suffered for a little, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” (1 Peter 5:8–10)

“... Now the salvation, and the power, and the Kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him [the devil, the accuser] because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death. For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you [saints] who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea; because the devil has come down to you having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.” (Rev. 12:10–12)

We who walk in the Kingdom have an adversary. The very word translated ‘Satan’ means adversary. Jesus teaches us to pray in Matthew 6, “... and do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil...” (vs 13) But that is a rather weak rendering, as the original Greek reads, “deliver us from the evil one,” using a masculine, direct article, nominative form of the word which clearly refers to Satan himself. In a number of places in the Gospels Jesus directs our attention to Satan, often in the same passage as talking about the Kingdom of God. (Matt. 12:26–28 and Mk. 4:15 ff, for example)

Scripturally, Satan is obviously not just some impersonal force for evil, no more than God is an impersonal force for good. Neither is Satan some goat-footed, horned little comic with a tail, a pitchfork, and a red flannel suit (a caricature which I’m sure he loves because it masks his sinister nature). No, he is a fallen angel who decided to become the personal adversary of God and everyone trying to enter the Kingdom of God. As a created being, Satan is neither omnipotent, nor omniscient, nor omnipresent – only Father God, dwelling in eternity, has these characteristics. But he is powerful, subtle, cunning, shrewd and deceptive, very intelligent, and full of anger and hatred toward God and all of God’s precious ones. Though Satan is not omnipresent, he has many other created

spirit beings (demons) who are in league with him to do his bidding, not to mention humans who sell their souls to him, such as the antichrist and the false prophet. (Rev. 13 – 20)

Earlier I stated that there is no condemnation in the Kingdom; there can't be, as the laws of the Kingdom (which are only laws of love) don't even have any concept of being condemning or judgmental. So why do we sometimes feel condemned when we are trying so hard to walk in the Kingdom, particularly after we have done our scriptural best to deal with our sins through repentance, restoration, and receiving forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ? That condemnation is sure not coming from God! Here is a clue. That old serpent, Satan, is "the accuser of the brethren, ... who accuses them before our God day and night." (Rev. 12:10)

So how do we resist him and walk free from his constant condemnations and accusations? Well, first, we don't 'respond in kind.' "... Let every one be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for the wrath of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." (James 1:19–20)

The adversary is full of wrath and hatred toward us, but as soon as we step down to do battle in his arena, we've already lost. Nothing, not one thing, in our human nature is strong enough to defeat Satan. Only divine love is stronger than hate; only divine peace is stronger than violence; only divine joy is stronger than fear and terror; only forgiveness is stronger than bitterness; only a quiet, gentle, caring answer is stronger than anger; only kindness and goodness are stronger than monstrous evil; only faithfulness is stronger than deceit; only self-control is stronger than wrath.

But wait; all those positive things are just aspects of God's own character, fruits of His Holy Spirit! That should be our first clue to a truly Kingdom way of resisting the devil.

What did Jesus do after He was filled with the Holy Spirit at His baptism? “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” (Matt. 4:1) All He did was to quote Scripture to him. When Satan quoted Scripture, Jesus simply refuted it with other Scripture. As weak as Jesus was during the forty day fast, He still triumphed over every temptation the devil could throw His way. This tells us that the Word of God, believed, confessed, and obeyed, ‘lived,’ is our victory against the adversary. That is the victory of faith.

But who is the Word of God? Jesus is the Word, the Living Word (Jn. 1:1–5), the full expression of the Father, the very embodiment of all these positive characteristics of God’s own nature, the only one who fully walked by the fruits of the Holy Spirit all His life. Here is our protection from the adversary: “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” (Gal. 3:27) “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh...” (Rom. 13:14)

The best way to resist the devil is to wear Jesus all the time. That sounds almost as bad as when Jesus said to eat Him and drink Him: “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise Him up on the last day...” Many therefore of His disciples, when they heard this, said, ‘This is a difficult statement; who can hear it?’ But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said... ‘It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.’” (Jn. 6:54–63)

The principle is the same. In the spirit realm, eating Him and drinking Him and wearing Him are the same as being filled with Him, dwelling in Him, living in Him and He in us, walking with Him, and so on. Yes, you guessed it. This is the Kingdom again. Our human nature cannot defeat Satan, but Christ’s nature in us, lived out through us, has already won.

“Finally, be strong in the Lord [Jesus] in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against [resist] the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenlies. Therefore take up [wear] the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with Truth [who is Jesus! John 14:6], and having put on the breastplate of [Jesus Christ’s] righteousness [1 Jn. 2:1], and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of [Jesus Christ’s] peace [Eph. 2:14]; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith [in Jesus Christ – Heb. 12:2], with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one [Satan]. And take the helmet of salvation [in Jesus Christ our Savior – Heb. 5:9], and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. [Jesus Christ – John 1:1] With all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the [Holy] Spirit [of Jesus Christ – Gal. 4:6].” (Eph. 6:10–18)

Pure Kingdom! Our protection against Satan is complete; Jesus has already won the victory! His own nature becomes our armor, and we wear it by simply walking with Him as King in our lives. “... He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature...” (2 Peter 1:4)

We do not ignore Satan. Sometimes the Holy Spirit leads us to deal directly with his temptations or lies, “... in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes.” (2 Cor. 2:11) But neither do we spend a lot of time wrestling with Satan. We have a job to do, and it is focused on the King and His Kingdom! Resisting Satan is incidental to our real job, proclaiming the Kingdom!

When you're up to your eyeballs in alligators, remember – you came here to drain the swamp! We know that at the right time, Satan will be bound and cast into the pit for a thousand years, and ultimately he will be cast into the lake of fire. (See Rev. 20:1–10) God said it, I believe it, and that settles it. Praise God! So let's stop merely fighting alligators and get on with our task of draining the swamp by proclaiming that the Kingdom of God is come and demonstrating it in our lives.

This Kingdom walk is by faith – our absolute faith in our King's total victory over sin, the flesh nature, and the devil.

Ten Commandments in the Kingdom

“For the law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near... For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins... He takes away the first in order to establish the second. By this we will have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He [Jesus], having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says YHWH: I will put My laws upon their heart, and upon their mind I will write them,’ He then says, ‘And their sins and lawless deeds I will remember no more.’ Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any [need for an] offering for sin.” (Heb. 10:1–18)

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Rom. 8:1–4) “Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those under the law, that every mouth may be closed and all the world become accountable to God; because by the works of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets; even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe... a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law... Do we then nullify the law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the law.” (Rom. 3:19–31) “For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.” (Rom. 6:14)

“Bear one another’s burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.” (Gal. 6:2) “Prove yourselves doers of the Word, and not merely hearers, who delude themselves... One who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty [in Christ Jesus], and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer, but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does... So speak and so act [Kingdom good deeds, again], as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.” (James 1:22–2:12)

By faith in Christ, we are under God’s grace and are not bound to keep the Old Covenant given by God to Moses at Mt. Sinai. In Christ we are free from the law! Free of its restraints, its judgments, its consequences, and its condemnations.

Virtually every Christian I know (myself included) agrees that this applies to all the Old Testament Jewish ceremonial laws, including sacrificial laws, dietary laws, laws of washing, civil laws, sabbath laws and laws of feast days, and so on. The whole book of Romans makes it clear that by His once-for-all sacrifice of Himself on the cross at Golgotha, Jesus did in fact fulfill, supersede, and abolish the Jewish ceremonial law with its blood sacrifices and everything that went along with them. We are under a new law now, the “Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus,” the “law of liberty,” the freedom to walk by the Spirit. There is no law against the fruits of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:23) We talked about this earlier in *The Kingdom Within*.

Does this mean that we can safely ignore the Old Testament and everything in it? Absolutely not! “Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” (1 Cor. 10:11) I believe that every single one of those old laws was given by a loving Father as a blessing to His precious children to keep them out of trouble, yes, but also to teach them about Himself and the principles of His Kingdom. We would do well to study them, not with the goal of trying to enforce them upon one another, but rather to learn wisdom from them. They are given us as a physical picture of the true Kingdom Law, which is a law of spirit.

What about the Ten Commandments? Loaded question! Most Christians insist that the Ten Commandments quoted at Mt. Sinai are not part of the Jewish ceremonial law, but are rather a separate moral law which was actually in effect from the time of Adam and Eve and has never been superseded. Their evidence: Jesus Christ Himself quoted many of the Ten Commandments, told people to keep them (Mk. 10:19) and in some ways even went way beyond them. (Matt. 5:17–48) However, may I offer a slightly different perspective?

I agree that the Ten Commandments (Ex 20 and Deut. 5) reflect a moral law higher than the Jewish ceremonial law, and are essential for teaching us about God and His ways. But I also believe that all Old Testament laws from Mt. Sinai are part of the Old Covenant God made with the Jews and are not binding for us who are under the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus. Evidence: Even those who most strongly insist that the Ten Commandments are binding upon Christians readily allow breaking the fourth commandment (keeping the Sabbath holy) in favor of Sunday. However, I believe that the principles Jesus taught (which go way beyond the Ten Commandments) are just as valid now as when He spoke them. This 'Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus' seems to be a much tougher law than the Ten Commandments ever were.

“The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since then the gospel of the Kingdom of God is preached, and every one is forcing his way into it. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke or letter of the law to fail. (Lk. 16:16–17) “Don’t think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.” (Matt. 5:17–19) “... Whatever you want others to do for you, do so for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” (7:12) “You shall love YHWH your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. A second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” (22:36–40)

Jesus did not abolish the law and replace it with grace. Neither did He fulfill the entire law singlehandedly by His death and resurrection. No! Rather He explained how the law of sin and death (which could only bring bondage and condemnation) was a dim picture of the true law, the highest law, the law of love, the law of liberty, the law of God's heart from the dawn of time. He taught us to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, living by the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus.

The law given Moses at Mt. Sinai is part of the Old Covenant with Israel. It is God's 'Constitution' for the government of the Jews. It brings life only if it is obeyed (Lev. 18:5; Lk. 10:28), but it condemned the Jews, and it can only condemn every one of us, since we all break it. (Neh. 9:29; Ezek. 20:11–26; Gal. 2:16, 3:10–13 ff) It can never justify us. That is why it is called "weak," (Rom. 8:3) and "the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones... [Yes, that specifically refers to the Ten Commandments, which were engraved on two stone tablets] the ministry of condemnation... which fades away..." (2 Cor. 3:7–11) "Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God... but now we have been released from the law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of Spirit and not in oldness of the letter." (Rom. 7:4–6) "Therefore the law has become our tutor [guide, nanny] to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." (Gal. 3:24–25)

Before you say, "Whee! I'm free of the law! I can do whatever I please!" bear in mind where we go when we die to the law. It is only 'in Christ' that we are free from the law. And in Christ, we are not led by our human desires, but by His Spirit. He transforms our 'pleaser' into what pleases Him.

What does He ‘please’? Why... the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus, of course. What is this law? How can we know how to obey it, when we are never given a list of do’s and don’ts? Well, this is ‘Life in Christ Jesus,’ after all. This law in essence is the very nature and character of Christ Jesus. There is no list of do’s and don’ts – only one: “This is My Son, My chosen one. Listen to Him!” (Lk. 9:35) as God Himself told the disciples on Mount Hermon at the transfiguration. This new law supersedes all the old laws God gave on Mount Sinai.

We learn to obey this new law by listening to His Spirit, learning of Him, becoming like Him, and being led by His Holy Spirit in all things. This is the law of love, the highest and best of all possible law, for in it there is no condemnation, only encouragement to reach up higher, ever higher, even to walk with God in the beauty of holiness. This is the law which was woven into the universe at the beginning of creation, and which holds the universe together from then until the end of time. This is the New Covenant, God’s ‘Constitution’ to govern His Kingdom, sealed with the blood of Jesus Christ (Lk. 22:20, 1 Cor. 11:25), “... written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts... our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate [competent, able, qualified] ministers of a New Covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” (2 Cor. 3:3–6)

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says YHWH: I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them upon their hearts. I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They shall not teach every one his fellow citizen or every one his brother saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” (Heb. 8:10–12)

Jesus introduces this New Covenant in His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7). He was speaking to Jews saturated with the Old Covenant. But instead of tearing down the Old Covenant, every time He mentioned it He made it stricter! (“You have heard it said... but I say to you...”) In fact, He made it so strict that no unaided human being can possibly keep it. (“You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” – Matt. 5:48) By itself, the Sermon on the Mount would be only an idealistic dream. But Jesus did more than just speak it; He proceeded to live His whole life by it, thus showing us the way. He did the will of the Father by being constantly in communion with (and led by) the Holy Spirit within Him. Now He expects us to do the same. “Not every one who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.” (Matt. 7:21)

Yes, this is indeed much stricter than the old law. But the Ten Commandments are a good summary pointing us toward this higher Law of the Spirit. In fact, all the old Jewish laws point us toward this higher Law; they each have glimpses of wisdom for us, if we look for the Holy Spirit to interpret – as long as we apply it to our own hearts and don’t try to build a kingdom of man by attempting to enforce it upon others!

It fascinates me that this higher Law is also called the law of liberty in James 1:22–2:12. How can it be liberty if it is so much stricter than the Old Covenant? Therein lies a paradox which can only be resolved in the Kingdom. The carnal man has a constant battle between his own desires and the law, so any law, internal or external, becomes a bondage to him. Even no law at all, which he thinks will finally set him free, becomes a bondage as he reaps the consequences of his choices. There can be no law of liberty for a carnal man! His nature is to battle for ‘self’ as lord of his life, while the purpose of law is to direct us to Jesus as our true Lord. “No one can serve two masters!”

But for us who seek first the Kingdom... Ahh! Our heart's desires have changed! "... If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (2 Cor. 5:17) Now our eyes are opened. We know the truth: our life is designed to function properly only with Jesus as Lord and King. "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (Jn. 8:32) That is the law of liberty! Now all that nonsense about "losing our life to save it" begins to make sense. Now we start to see things from God's perspective – to appreciate the way He made us and to long to be restored to His original design, with His Spirit lovingly guiding us by His infinite wisdom. Finally we realize that real freedom is the joy of becoming all that we were made to be. So now let's look at the Ten Commandments and see what we can discern from them about this new Law, the law of liberty, the law of love, the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus.

1. You shall have no other gods before Me. Set your heart to love Me and all My nature and My ways. To love Me wholeheartedly is life and joy and peace and every good thing, for then you will love what I love and hate what I hate. Human love is basically self-centered and leads to idolatry. But if you will love Me first, I will give you My divine, self-giving love. That will correct all your other relationships, for I will enable you to see everything through the lens of divine, selfless love.

2. You shall not make for yourself an idol. My own heart's desire is to lavish My love upon you in return; I want to bless you above and beyond all you can ask or think! But I can only do that to the extent that you accept My blessings in grateful praise, returning to Me the glory, and refusing to let My blessings become idols and steal your heart away from Me. I am as revealed in My Word. Put aside any false ideas of Me (which are also idols) and learn of Me from My Word, that you may love and worship Me in spirit and in truth as I really am.

3. You shall not take the name of Jehovah your God in vain. My good name represents my nature and character – all that I am. As you bear My name with honor, those who don't know Me will see Me in you and love what they see! I have many names. As you use each one, I establish My relationship with you based on your own understanding and use of that name. Those who use My names lightly or crudely cannot have anything but superficial relationships with me.

4. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. One day of physical rest each seven days is essential for your physical health. Any day of the week is fine for that. But the rest of faith, turning aside from personal pleasures to do My will on My holy day – My seventh-day Sabbath that I sanctified at creation – is even more essential for your spiritual health, and is the best way to learn to walk with Me by My Spirit.

5. Honor your father and your mother. I am your true Father and Mother. As you honor your earthly parents, you learn to honor Me. You cannot fully appreciate all that I am and all that I have done for you without appreciating the parents I gave you. Though the picture is marred by sin, yet they were still your best picture of Me when you were young.

6. You shall not murder. I am Life. Human life is sacred, even from the moment of conception. Those who usurp My authority to take a human life have become My adversary, Satan. But beyond that, when you recognize Me as the source of all life, you joyfully participate with Me in setting creation free from the bondage and futility of sin, suffering, and death. Every life-form has its purpose, such as plants to eat, bugs to feed the birds, carrion eaters to cleanse the earth of the dead, and humans to rule over all else. When you reverence each form of life for its created purpose and treat it accordingly, you are showing reverence for Me as the author of life.

7. **You shall not commit adultery.** I will not share you with other lovers! I made you for Me. I am for you. I created the bond between husband and wife as a picture of My own bond with you, My beloved. My own oneness and purity is on display within My saints and their spouses who covenant together in oneness and purity. In this our ever-deepening relationship, I long for the consummation of our oneness, that we may enjoy each other throughout the ages of the ages.

8. **You shall not steal.** I am the source of all things, so all theft is against Me. I made things to be a blessing to My people, but things that are stolen or misused become a curse, not a blessing. I love to give you good things, but not if they turn your heart away from Me! So set your heart on My Kingdom, and things will take their proper place. You honor Me when you are a good steward of what I give you, as well as when you help to protect for your neighbor all that I have given him.

9. **You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.** Lying is always against your neighbor, for any lie is against Me and all My precious ones. I am truth! My Word is truth! My law is truth! My nature and character are truth! No liar has any part in Me. You, My son, are an expression of My truth to My world, and I allow no lies to mar the display of My glory to My creation! The devil has done his best to bring lies and perversion into My world, but he has failed, and his lies are wearing thin. It is time for my sons to stand boldly in My truth, that all creation may see the lie exposed for what it is.

10. **You shall not covet.** Sinners seek desperately for things, to give them comfort, security, and happiness, never realizing that only I can fill that void. But you saints don't covet, because you really trust Me! You know that I meet your needs, satisfy your longings, and fill your lives with happiness and joy. Thus you are perfectly content in all things.

The Sabbath Rest

“If because of the Sabbath you turn your foot from doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, holy of YHWH, honorable, and shall honor it, desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure, and speaking your own word, then you will take delight in YHWH. And I will make you ride on the heights of the earth, and will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of YHWH has spoken.” (Isa. 58:13–14)

“But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘today,’ lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin...to whom did He swear that they should not enter His Rest, but to those who were disobedient? And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief. Therefore let us fear, lest, while a promise remains of entering His Rest, any of you should seem to have come short of it... For we who have believed enter that Rest... His works were finished from the foundation of the world. For thus He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day, ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all his works...’ Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had the good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience... There remains therefore a Sabbath Rest for the people of God... Let us therefore be diligent [work hard!] to enter that Rest, lest anyone fall through following the same example of disobedience.” (Heb. 3:13–4:11, excerpts)

No discussion of the Kingdom is complete without looking also at the Sabbath Rest. This theme is not only central in the Ten Commandments, it is scattered liberally throughout the entire Bible. Yet it is the commandment on which there has been the most controversy. Why? It must be important for Satan to have worked so hard to pervert it.

Walking in the Kingdom is walking in the Sabbath Rest, desisting from doing my own works and speaking my own words and seeking my own pleasure, doing only the things we see the Father doing, working hard but only in obedience to the Father, which is true rest, delighting in Him and joyfully participating in His works completed from the creation of the world, in oneness of heart with the Father. Sounds like what Jesus did while He walked this earth, doesn't it? It should – that is indeed what He did during His earthly ministry.

Isn't it strange that Jesus walked in continuous Sabbath Rest, doing only what the Father led Him to do, and still the Pharisees crucified Him for, get this, breaking the Sabbath?!

Mmm. No, I guess it isn't so strange. I remember a period of time in my life when I was earnestly seeking to be led by the Holy Spirit in entering into His Sabbath Rest. I was wrestling with the Lord about the Jewish Sabbath (Friday evening through Saturday evening) versus the Christian Sabbath (basically Sunday morning), and a church elder came for a visit. He was concerned and anxious that I was setting a bad example for the faithful, because I was 'breaking the Sabbath' by skipping church on Sunday. At the time I found that pretty hard to take (although now I see some cause for his concern).

Please understand, I do not have a problem with going to church on Sunday. I love church. I love the fellowship, the corporate worship, the Scripture study, the exhortations, the growth in faith and knowledge, the spiritual encouragement that I find there, not to mention the opportunities for ministry and blessing others. I love it on Saturday, Sunday, or any other day of the week that our local church fellowship chooses to meet, for I believe that God is not limited to meet with His people on any particular day.

But I love the Kingdom more.

And if the Holy Spirit leads me to stay away from church for a while and just wait on Him – immerse myself in prayer and worship and wrestling with God for His promises, crying out to Him for a fuller measure of His Spirit, earnestly seeking first the Kingdom – a wise church elder will encourage me, rather than claiming I’m breaking the Sabbath and setting a bad example! Even the apostle Paul skipped church for at least three years, possibly as much as fourteen years, waiting on the Lord Himself, alone in Arabia. (See Gal. 1:11–2:2)

I encourage you all to regularly attend your local church fellowship. “Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as is the habit of some, but encourage one another, and all the more as you see the day [of the Lord – Judgment Day, the end of the age] drawing near.” (Heb. 10:25)

But I encourage you even more to regularly go to the Holy Spirit and see where He would have you go and what He would have you do. He may well have you develop the godly habit of attending your local church fellowship and becoming active (read: a responsible and dependable ministry) there. But He may also lead you someplace else today, and a different place tomorrow. He may lead you to change churches, even to one that you don’t like nearly as well. He may also lead you to stay home and wait on Him. He might even lead you to stay home and play with your children for once. (Gasp!)

He gets to do that, you know. He is Lord!

When was the last time you woke up on Sunday morning and asked, “Lord, this is the day that You have made. What would You have me do in it?” Might that not be an even better godly habit than blindly, unthinkingly (even sleepily or grumpily) going to church on Sunday? In fact, might that not be a great habit to develop every day of the week – maybe even every minute of every day? That is walking in the Kingdom.

A word of caution is in order here. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Living Word, will not lead you contrary to His own written Word, the Holy Scriptures. Checking the Scriptures is a good test to ensure you're following the leading of the Holy Spirit and not some other spirit or your own "deceitful and desperately wicked" human heart. (Jer. 17:9) Again, walking in the Kingdom is not a trivial task!

God may, for example, lead you to stay away from church and even from all Christian fellowship for a time of fasting and prayer, but He will not lead you to disassociate yourself permanently from Christian fellowship. His Word says that we need one another, we need the regular assemblies, we need to learn to love one another, bear one another's burdens, pray for one another – in short, we need to learn to be one body in Christ. There are no Lone Ranger Christians in the Kingdom. We each have blind spots, weaknesses, and shortcomings. Only by helping one another – showing our love for Christ in our deeds of love – will any of us 'make it' in the Kingdom.

Okay. So far so good. But I can hear you thinking, "I thought the Sabbath was only for rest and worship, while you insist that the Kingdom is for good works. What if He leads me to do good works on the Sabbath? Would that not violate the fourth Commandment, which is also part of His Word?"

Good question. What would Jesus say to that? Isn't that exactly what He was dealing with in Matthew 12, concluding: "... What man shall there be among you, who shall have one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it, and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good [works] on the Sabbath." (vs 11–12) I maintain, in fact, I insist, that the good works of the Kingdom are not a labor or a burden, but rather the joy of sharing in His 'finished works.' (Heb. 4:3)

“Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious toward wrongdoers. For they will wither quickly like the grass, and fade like the green herb. Trust in YHWH, and do good. [This is Kingdom stuff, guys, don’t miss it!] Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in YHWH, and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to YHWH; Trust also in Him, and He will do it. And he will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday. Rest in YHWH and wait patiently for Him... for evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for YHWH, they will inherit the land... The righteous will inherit the land, and dwell in it forever.” (Ps. 37:1–9, 29)

Allow me to paraphrase that: Don’t worry about the wicked and their goals, ambitions, customs, traditions, and rules; their focus on getting more stuff, power, or glory; their self-centered pursuits; or their mocking and condemning of anyone trying to walk in the Kingdom. They don’t know that they are in bondage to sin and the end of that road is death. Put your faithful, steadfast trust in YHWH, delighting in Him continually. Dwell in the land with good deeds, committing your ways to YHWH and trusting Him to direct your steps and give you His heart’s desires to be your own heart’s desires. Then your deeds will be judged as righteous, you will find your rest and peace in YHWH, and as you wait patiently for Him, He will give you permanent possession of the Kingdom.

Let’s look deeper at the Old Testament commandment. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath of YHWH your God; in it you shall not do any work... For in six days YHWH made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore God blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy [sanctified it].” (Ex. 20:8–11)

When is the Sabbath? “And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning: the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. By the seventh day God had completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified [hallowed] it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.” (Gen. 1:31–2:3) The Sabbath is the evening and morning of the seventh day. Evening comes before morning in the Scripture. The Sabbath, as given by our Creator God, starts at dusk on what we now call Friday and ends at dusk on what we now call Saturday. God Himself sanctified that day. That is a fact totally consistent throughout Scripture; no amount of theological gyrations can change it.

“... You shall surely observe My Sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am YHWH who sanctifies you. Therefore you are to observe the Sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to YHWH... So the sons of Israel shall observe the Sabbath, to celebrate the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days YHWH made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from His labor, and was refreshed.” (Ex. 31:13–17)

There is no doubt in my mind that YHWH's Sabbaths are on the seventh day, the same day that the Jews still celebrate the Sabbath, now and forever. These passages confirm it, as they tie it all the way back to Creation when God labored for the six days of Creation and then rested on the seventh day.

I've wrestled with this subject for years. I read a number of studies by those trying to prove that somehow the Christian day of rest was changed to Sunday, or that the Jews lost count of the days, or that the calendar was changed, or we lost a day somewhere, or even that God told the early disciples to change it but that somehow never quite made it into the Bible, or other such foolishness. From the times when Jesus kept and taught others to keep the Sabbath (See Lk. 4:16, 31) until now, the only calendar change was in 1582 when Pope Gregory changed dates but not days of the week: Thursday October 4 was followed by Friday October 15.

My response was to do what I always recommend when you face an inconsistency: I went back to God's Word. I spent about two years just going through the entire Bible, looking for anything it might say on the subject. I found not one shred of scriptural evidence that God had un-sanctified the Sabbath and sanctified Sunday instead. For those of you who believe that we Christians are bound by the Jewish moral law (the Ten Commandments) and yet try to justify a Sunday observance rather than the Sabbath, you're being inconsistent; you are following the tradition of men rather than the law of God.

How did this tradition ever start? To summarize a huge subject, it started when the first century church was (rightly) instructed that the saints are not bound by the Jewish law (Ten Commandments included) but rather are free in Christ (as described in Galatians 2:16 through 5:18). Many early Christians continued meeting for worship on the Sabbath as well as on other days. Some even "continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house..." (Acts 2:46) But others maintained that keeping the Jewish Sabbath was a stumbling block, as it tended to put Christians back under the whole Jewish legal system and kept them from realizing their freedom in Christ. (Gal. 4:9 ff; 5:4 ff)

Some felt so free they forsook the assemblies altogether. (Heb:10:25) Others chose to worship on Sunday, which they (wrongly) believed to be the day Christ arose from the grave. The issue was settled by Roman emperor Constantine, who supposedly converted to Christianity in the fourth century. He dictated a day of rest on “the venerable Day of the Sun,” thus forging a compromise between Christianity and pagan sun-worshippers. The church dubbed this newly sanctified day, ‘The Lord’s day’ due to a misinterpretation of Rev. 1:10: “I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, like the sound of a trumpet.” They claimed John was “in worship on Sunday,” though the verse actually says that John was taken up in the spirit to a future time period known throughout Scripture as “the day of the Lord,” which we know from every other Scripture to be the period of God’s final judgments upon mankind. (For example: Joel 1:15; 2:1; Zeph. 1:7, 14, 18; 2:2–3; and much of Revelation.)

Roman Catholics therefore boast: “Ques. – Have you any other way of proving that the [Roman] church has power to institute festivals of precept? Ans. – Had she not such power, she could not have done that in which all modern religionists agree with her: she could not have substituted the observance of Sunday the first day of the week, for the observance of Saturday the seventh day, a change for which there is no scriptural authority.” (*A Doctrinal Catechism*, 3rd Edition, pg. 174, by Stephen Keenan)

If, as Roman Catholic tradition teaches, Jesus died on Good Friday evening and arose on Easter Sunday morning, then the Bible has some serious errors, and Jesus cannot be the Messiah. He Himself predicated His messiahship on the “sign of Jonah” (Matt. 12:38–40), affirming that just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so he would be in the grave for three days and three nights.

Those who claim that Jewish tradition allows for turning three days and three nights into one day and two nights, are simply wrong. Count it out. A Jewish day begins at sundown. Friday evening to Saturday evening is one full day. From then until dawn Sunday morning, adds another night. Even a child should realize that one day plus two nights cannot equal three days and three nights. If Jesus was in the grave significantly less than seventy-two hours, then His own prophecy was false and He was a deceiver as His enemies claim. (Matt. 27:63 ff)

But when we let the Scripture tell us when He died and rose again, we find that Jesus told the truth. In fulfilling that prophecy, He also fulfilled many Old Testament passages which only come alive when we see Jesus as the Passover Lamb and the ceremonial feasts as prophetic of His coming.

Our problem is that the Gospels don't always tell the story in chronological order. This creates conflicts. The following sequence seems to harmonize most of the Scriptures and iron out most of the conflicts, though other ways are also possible.

Nisan 8 – (from Wednesday sunset to Thursday sunset – hereafter abbreviated to Thursday), six days before Passover. The seventy are already in Bethany, celebrating the success of their ministry tour. Jesus arrives about sunset, on his way to Jerusalem, knowing He will die there in seven days. Jewish leaders have been searching for Him. The Jews purchase a perfect Passover lamb and bring him home about sunset.

Nisan 9 – (Friday), five days before Passover. Dinner is at Simon's house. Mary anoints Jesus with expensive perfume. The next morning, Jesus rides into Jerusalem in triumph on a donkey's colt and is welcomed by the people. He weeps over Jerusalem, then goes to teach in the temple. This is the day the priests anoint the Passover lamb for the sacrifice and bring it triumphantly from Bethlehem into the temple at Jerusalem.

Nisan 10 – (the normal Jewish Sabbath), four days before Passover. Jesus eats the Shabbat meal in Bethany. The next morning He curses the fig tree and then casts the merchants out of the temple and cleanses it for the second time. (The first cleansing was at the Passover at the beginning of His ministry three years before.) The scribes and Pharisees angrily grill Jesus as He teaches in the temple. God shouts from heaven to confirm Jesus' words. Jesus prophesies His death and His victory over death. (Jn. 12:28–34) Over these next four days, the Passover lamb is inspected for blemishes.

Nisan 11 – (Sunday), three days before Passover. They find the cursed fig tree is withered. Jesus teaches in the temple all day. The Pharisees continue to grill Him but are unable to find fault with Him. They try to trap Him, but He avoids their traps and amazes them with His wisdom. Jewish officials question His authority and try to seize Him but fear the people. Jesus refuses to tell them where His authority comes from and pronounces eight woes against them. He weeps over Jerusalem a second time and then flees to Mount Olivet to spend the night there with His disciples.

Nisan 12 – (Monday), two days before Passover. Jesus gives His famous Olivet Discourse that night, prophesying of the future destruction of the temple, the end times, and His Second Coming, ending with parables teaching us to be watchful. Judas arranges with the chief priests to betray Jesus, missing most of Jesus' famous sermon. Jesus prophesies again to His disciples of His death. The Jewish leaders realize that He will have to be killed before the Feast of Unleavened Bread, or the people will make Him King. But the next morning (remember that morning follows evening in a Jewish day), Jesus goes to the temple again and teaches all day with many parables of the Kingdom. Jewish officials no longer dare to challenge Him publicly for fear of the people.

Nisan 13 – (Tuesday), the day before Passover. As before, Jesus spends the night at Mount Olivet, probably continuing or adding to His Olivet Discourse. The next morning, Jesus returns to the temple, teaching the people of the coming Kingdom – His last full day to do so. Towards evening (which begins the Passover), Jesus sends His disciples into Jerusalem to find the man who has (by the prompting of the Holy Spirit) prepared the Passover for Him and His disciples. They have the Passover supper ready by sunset when Jesus arrives.

Nisan 14 – (Wednesday), Passover day; also called the First of Unleavened Bread and Preparation Day for the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Jesus eats the Passover meal (minus the Passover lamb, which had not yet been slain) with His disciples in the evening. Jesus also washes the disciples' feet, sends Judas out, and gives His last sermon, which Judas obviously misses. Jesus prays His great high priestly prayer, predicts Peter's denial, and goes to Gethsemane. He is captured at midnight, delivered for judgment early Wednesday morning (before the first cock crows), taken to Pilate about 6:00 AM, and nailed to the cross about 9:00 AM. Darkness falls at noon. He dies about 3:00 PM and is laid in the tomb by about 6:00 PM. The official Passover lamb was traditionally prepared for the sacrifice between 9:00 and 11:00 AM and slain by about 3:00 PM on this day.

Nisan 15 – (Thursday), the first day of the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread. Levitical law requires this day (and the seventh day) to be a 'high Sabbath,' regardless of when it may fall during the week. So everyone rests according to the law, and all the stores are closed. The Jewish leaders go to Pilate to secure a guard at the tomb. Peter, Andrew, and James visit the tomb and report back to the others about the sealed tomb and the Roman guards. Most Jews eat the Passover lamb in their homes at the beginning of this day (our Wednesday evening).

Nisan 16 – (Friday), Preparation Day for the weekly Sabbath. The women buy and prepare the perfumes and spices. Note: if Jesus had died on Friday and rose early Sunday as most Roman Catholics claim, the women would not have found any markets open to buy spices! This is the second full day that Jesus is in the grave.

Nisan 17 – (Saturday), the weekly Sabbath. Everyone rests according to the law. This is the third full day that Jesus is in the grave. He rises from the dead minutes before the end of the Sabbath. So He was actually in the grave a full seventy-two hours, probably to the minute, fulfilling His own prophecy.

Nisan 18 – (Sunday), the first day of the week. The women start out for the tomb while it is still dark (Jn. 20:1) and get there about sunrise. They find that Jesus has already risen. They run and tell Peter and John, who come to verify it and leave again. Mary stays behind and sees Jesus but is not permitted to touch Him (Jn. 20:11–18) until after the firstfruits are waved to God to sanctify the harvest. (Lev. 23:11) Mary and the rest of us are the harvest. Jesus, our firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:20, 23; Rev. 1:5), completes our sanctification when He ascends to the Father, exactly at the same time as the high priest is waving the firstfruits offering, Sunday morning.

Thus Jesus has fulfilled, not only all the prophecies that we Christians are aware of regarding His sacrificial death and resurrection, but also all those prophecies hidden within the Feasts of Israel which most Christians don't even understand.

Jewish tradition states that a person must be in the grave for three days and three nights before he or she is considered truly dead. This is why Jesus waited for the fourth day before raising Lazarus from the dead. (Jn. 11:6, 17 ff) If Jesus had only been in the grave a day and two nights, the Jews certainly would have claimed that He had never really died at all!

But I believe that the Scriptures are true, regardless of the traditions of man. The death and resurrection of Jesus is one of the most thoroughly documented events in history and is the climax of Scripture. But only when all of Scripture is woven together do you get a true and complete picture of what actually happened. Truth is important! We who seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness also seek for His truth, because it is His truth that opens the door to His righteousness. Right beliefs, right perception, and right thinking (a right worldview) leads to the right actions (good deeds) of the Kingdom. For example, a right understanding of the Sabbath, the day God sanctified for all time for us to cease from our own labors and pleasures and seek His will, to do His work and speak His words, leads to right living, in harmony with Him and His created design, every day of the week.

“I gave them My statutes and informed them of My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live. And also I gave them My Sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them. But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness. They did not walk in My statutes, and they rejected My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live; and My Sabbaths they greatly profaned... for their heart continually went after idols... I am YHWH your God; walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances to observe them. Sanctify My Sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am YHWH your God. But the children [of Israel] rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, nor were they careful to observe [keep] My ordinances, by which if a man observes them he will live; and they profaned My Sabbaths. So I resolve to pour out My wrath on them... I gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live...” (He gave them up to the pagan nations and their false gods. Ezek. 20:11–25)

Did you ever stop to think that the Sabbath is not just a Jewish law? Sanctified on the seventh day of creation, it was given to all mankind 'in Adam' in the Garden of Eden. This is important. We Christians are under the New Covenant, written by the Holy Spirit on the tablets of our hearts, not under the Old Covenant, the Ten Commandments written on tablets of stone given to Moses. (2 Cor. 3:3) The Law of God written on our hearts is the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus. It is much higher and better than the Old Covenant because it guides our motivations rather than just controlling our actions. The Sabbath principle, far from being exclusive to the Old Covenant, is also at the heart of the New Covenant!

In our learning to sanctify the Sabbath in our hearts and keep it holy, our sense of 'The Holy' is revived, our focus and dedication to walk with 'The Holy' is developed, and our communication with 'The Holy' is restored, so that we also can be about our Father's business as ambassadors for Christ, speaking His word of Reconciliation, for "the love of Christ controls us..." (2 Cor. 5:14-21)

In 1985, I was wrestling with the Lord about trying to keep the Jewish Sabbath. For months I tried to set aside Friday evening to Saturday evening for resting and waiting on the Lord. But God had other plans! Every week He would send someone who really needed help, and I'd end up spending the day working! It was really getting frustrating; it seemed like the Lord was fighting me! But finally (with my head inside a big tractor transmission that I had to fix for a brother on the Sabbath), He spoke to me, chiding me for putting myself back under the old law. He then set me free from bondage to the Old Covenant and began to teach me of the law of liberty. Over the next few weeks, the Lord gave me many thoughts that I organized and wrote down in poem format. It literally changed my life! Maybe it will help some others as well.

In essence, Jesus told me, “The commandment is not just ‘don’t work,’ but rather, ‘remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy.’ The Sabbath was never made to be a restriction, a heavy bondage, upon man, but rather to set man free from the everyday toils of making a living, so his soul and spirit can be refreshed and restored. It is like sleep restoring the body; if you despise My gift of sleep and work day and night, your body will soon fail you. Just so if you despise My Sabbaths, you are only hurting yourself, and your soul and spirit will slowly wither and die.

“I did not work on the Sabbath. I gave My body willingly and completely to My Father, to accomplish His works through Me. This was My joy and delight, a refreshing to My soul and spirit. It fed Me and satisfied My thirst and gave Me strength for the day, not just on the Sabbath, but every day of My ministry on earth.

“The Sabbath is a day of remembering, back to that first glorious Sabbath when there was no sin to cloud the glory of My creation. Remember the garden I planted for you, the animals I gave you dominion over, the food plants and trees bearing bountifully, the soil bringing forth joyfully of its strength for you. Remember your delight in walking with Me by the pool in the cool of the evening. Remember My joy in looking over all that I had created, when I could still say, ‘Behold, it is very good!’ Remember, Sabbath by Sabbath, and ponder, for as you remember that first Sabbath, you will also catch the vision of the last Sabbath, My Rest I have prepared for you. This vision is important, for you do not stumble into My Kingdom by accident. Only those who have the eyes to see it and the heart to wholeheartedly want it will obtain it.

“You see, the Sabbath is a day of training to enable you to walk in My Kingdom I have prepared for you. My works are completed, perfect for all time. But to you they do not seem so, for your vision is still bound by limitations of time and circumstances surrounding you in the physical realm.

“I have allowed this for a purpose. I do want you to enter into My Rest of My completed works, but also I choose that you, My precious ones, shall share in My glory by working with Me to make My works manifest on the earth so all may see.

“This work is rest! It is peace, and joy, and total delight, for as you enter in with all your heart, you will find that the work is already done, the victory is already won, and all that remains is for you to speak the words of faith by My Spirit within you, and all creation will be set free! It is in this freedom that every eye will be opened to see the restoration of all things to My original plan and intent; therefore, the words you speak are words of reconciliation. When you see something that seems wrong, seems to conflict with My Word, reconcile it! Speak the Word by My Spirit, that the truth may become evident to all and Satan’s lies forever banished.

“Satan appears to be raging, and indeed he is, for he knows his time is short. But to Me, he is already defeated, and all his works are lies. Have no faith in his works, even if your physical senses tell you they are true, but rather believe My Word only, and you will see that all of Satan’s works are a fabrication built upon the foundation of lies, for he was a liar from the beginning and is the father of it. You have been conditioned by his lies far more than you know. For too many years, you believed all that you saw or felt without regard for My Word.

“But now it is time for the restoration of all things. I invite you, come now into My Sabbath Rest, that I may cleanse you of these past conditionings and heal you and teach you My ways. Many know My acts; they are proclaimed from the pulpit every Sunday. But few will take the time to open up their hearts to Me on My Sabbath, to learn My ways and purposes, to share the thoughts and intentions of My heart, that we may be one heart, one mind, one will, one purpose, one love, and one spirit of righteousness, compassion, justice, and judgment.

“As you open up your heart to My Sabbath Rest, I will teach you how to really rest! I gladly take all your burdens, troubles, cares, and concerns of the week. Put them aside for a day while I teach you to be what you were created to be. They will not get worse waiting for one day, and you will be refreshed and far better able to carry them again when that day is over, for in truth, it will not be you, but My strength renewed in you that takes up those burdens again. I know that you will always have earthly burdens and concerns. Now I show you a way to partake of My unlimited wisdom, power, and authority to carry those burdens, while you take on yourself My one burden, which is easy and light, a joy and refreshing.

“My burden I give you is My love – love for My people whom I created after My image, and for My world which I made to be to them an enjoyment and blessing. Come to Me, learn of Me to enter My Sabbath Rest, doing with Me the will of our Father, reconciling all things to oneness with Us, blessing, encouraging, loving, caring, sharing, healing, ministering life and joy and peace in a world where death and fear and strife seem so real, and establishing the relationships that grow the Kingdom of God.

“Hidden within My precious ones for so long, My Kingdom is about to be revealed for every eye to see! You, my saints, are now in training to be that nation of kings and priests who shall rule in oneness with Me for a thousand years over all that I have made. This is the Sabbath Rest that I have prepared for you, of which all previous Sabbaths are but a dim picture. The time is now, yet so many of My own are not ready; My heart aches for them because of all the training and discipline they have yet to go through in such a short time. If you would rule with Me, you must go through what I went through – yes, even the death and burial of your self-nature – that you may walk in oneness with Me. You must learn obedience as I learned obedience, through the things that I suffered. Yet now I show you a better way.

“Enter now into My Sabbaths, and I will teach you perfect obedience. I tasted death for you that you need not die, but rather have abundant, joyous, healthy, victorious life! My Sabbaths are your open door into My perfection, and I am interceding now at Father’s right hand for you to fully enter into oneness with Me in all that I am, that you may find your perfection in Me and in My body on earth; so that you, My many-membered body, in oneness with Me, may do Father’s works in an even greater way than ever.”

That is the Kingdom!

The Kingdom Without

“... He went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the Kingdom of God was going to appear immediately. He said therefore, ‘A certain nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return...’” (Lk. 19:11 ff) After which follows the familiar story of the good slaves who put their King’s money to work and made more for him while the wicked slave hid his mina in the handkerchief. Immediately following is Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem, when “... the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles they had seen, saying, ‘Blessed is the King who comes in the name of YHWH; Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.’ Then some of the Pharisees in the multitude said to Him, ‘Teacher, rebuke Your disciples!’ And He answered and said, ‘I tell you, if these become silent, the very stones will cry out!’” (vs 37–40)

“Jesus answered, ‘My Kingdom is not of this world. If My Kingdom were of this world, then My servants would fight that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My Kingdom is not of this realm.’” (Jn. 18:36)

“... Take heed that you be not misled; for many will come in My name, saying I [Jesus] am He [the Messiah] and the time [for My return] is at hand [the pre-trib rapture heresy]. Do not go after them. And when you hear of wars and disturbances, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end does not follow immediately... Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be great earthquakes... plagues and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you to synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name’s sake. It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony. So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute. But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death, and you will be hated by all on account of My name. Yet not a hair of your head will perish. By your perseverance you will win your souls... Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads because your redemption is drawing near... When you see these things happening, recognize that the Kingdom of God is near. Truly I say to you, this generation [that sees these things] will not pass away until all things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

“Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come on you suddenly like a trap, for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of the earth. But keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.” (Lk. 21:8–36; see also the parallel passage in Matt. 24–25)

“... He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the Kingdom of God. And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, ‘Which,’ He said, ‘you heard from Me; for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’ And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, ‘Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the Kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and even to the remotest part of the earth.’

“And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; and they also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.’” (Acts 1:2–11)

“The seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them... In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound [the last trump], then the mystery of God is finished, as He said to His servants the prophets... And the seventh angel sounded; and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever.’ And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, ‘We give Thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who is and who was and who is coming, because Thou hast taken Thy great power and hast begun to reign. And the nations were enraged, and Thy wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to give their reward to Thy bond-servants the prophets and to the saints and to those who fear Thy name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.’” (Rev. 8:6; 10:7; 11:15–18)

“He who overcomes, who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations. He shall rule them with a rod of iron... ” (Rev. 2:26–27)

I’m sure you noticed that the above Scripture passages all refer to a future Kingdom of God that Jesus will establish when He returns in great power and glory at the end of the age. Throughout this book I have been emphasizing the Kingdom within: the leading of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ the King within the hearts of His saints and our response of obedience out of love. But I cannot deny that someday, at a day and hour which no man knows, Jesus will Himself physically return to earth for every eye to see, the kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign in and through His saints forever and ever, ruling over the nations with a rod of iron.

That will happen. It is in God's Word. It is truth, and I believe it. Maybe I'll write another book someday; but that is not the focus of this book! I believe this book is necessary preparation for that great and awesome day of the Lord. Only we who are walking by authority and direction of the King within will be ready for the Kingdom without. If we are going to "have strength to escape all these things... and to stand before the Son of Man," (Lk. 21:36) we must receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon us, to be His witnesses. (Acts 1:8)

Conclusions

Why are you looking here for conclusions? I've given you all I had, but I certainly can't draw your conclusions for you! Some of what I've said may have witnessed to your heart. That was probably the Holy Spirit. Pray about it, study the Scriptures involved, and see if He will confirm it to you. If so, there are your conclusions.

On the other hand, some of what I said probably struck you as all wet. Okay. Did you pray about it and study the Scriptures involved? Did you specifically ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten you on the subject? If you did, then that was probably the Holy Spirit as well, and I probably am all wet.

Frankly, it wouldn't surprise me. I've done my best, but with this much material, I'm sure I've made errors here and there. Please do me the favor of lovingly challenging me on it. Pray that God will give me the humility to hear you so He can correct me through you. Believe me, I have a long way to grow in the Kingdom before I'm ready to stand before the King and give an answer for my life! As I prepared this study course, I got the feeling that I, too, am just a beginner in the Kingdom.

There is a third possibility. There may be some things in here that just went whhhhup! right past you, and you never even noticed, or never figured out what in the world (er, in the Kingdom) I was talking about. Well, I know this is going to sound stupid, but if it doesn't bother you don't let it bother you. You are in a different place in your growth in Christ than I am. He may be teaching you different lessons, taking you through different classes. That's okay. He gets to do that. He is the King.

On the other hand, if it does bother you, maybe that is the challenge of the Holy Spirit to your heart. I urge you, accept the challenge! Wrestle with Him on it in prayer. Go over the Scriptures again. Talk to others: your Christian friends, the pastor, me, whomever you can nab. Who knows, maybe it's time to grow a bit in Christ, and maybe He chose this time and place and even this book to help you do it. Praise God! He has grown me in writing it. I will be thankful if He uses it to help grow you as well.

Now that we've finished with the conclusions, I do have a few practical suggestions that have been a help for me. Maybe they could help you as well.

1. I always try to start each day with prayer. First the Lord's Prayer, then maybe some thankfulness and worship, and ending with a request for the filling and guidance of the Holy Spirit for the day. It is a tremendous comfort for me to know that I have committed the day to God and committed myself to His service, for I can trust that whatever happens that day is from His hand and is for my good and His glory.

2. I sip hot water (to cleanse my body) while having my spiritual breakfast (to cleanse my soul). I try to spend time in God's Word every morning with the prayer that He will speak to me through it. He usually does when I wait on Him.

3. Once my heart is in tune with the Lord through prayer, worship, and reading of God's Word, I expect God to lead me. I still try to pause many times a day to re-tune my heart to the Lord to see if He has any redirection for me.

4. Especially when I'm about to do something different, I try to wait on the Lord a bit to be sure that I have His peace in my spirit before proceeding.

5. When I do sense a check in my spirit (this can be either a sense of hesitation that maybe what I'm about to do is not God's best or alternately a sense of encouragement to do something that I was not going to do) I try to take the time to wait on the Lord a bit in prayer to confirm what He is saying.

6. I try to confirm what I seem to be hearing in my spirit with what I know about God's nature and character and with what His Word specifically says. He will never lead me in contradiction to His own Word or in violation of His own nature and character.

7. If the decision I am facing is a significant one, it may be wise to seek additional confirmation. In these cases, I often check with my wife, parents, or with an elder or pastor. It may call for an extended time of prayer and waiting on God. God always seems to be willing to provide additional confirmation if I'm willing to take the time and effort to prayerfully seek it, especially if I am really trying to clear my heart of my own desires and seek His best. God does not force! He wants me to voluntarily lay down my desires and pick up His desires for me. My problem is that I have a human nature just like you, and it is "...deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9 KJV) While I know that God is greater than my heart, and that He is able to keep me from evil and guard me from the evil one, I must not presume. Waiting patiently on Him until He confirms it tells Him I'm serious.

8. When all the lights are green – I’ve taken the time to commit it to the Lord in prayer, I sense that God is leading me to do it, I have God’s peace in my heart, I know it is in line with God’s Word and with His nature and character, I feel His desire rather than just my own desires within me to do it, it seems to be in harmony with my own spirit, soul, and body, and other trusted saints (spouse, family, and church family) around me at least do not have any opposing witness (and some may have confirming witness) – I do it. This is where the rubber meets the road. I just do it, trusting God for the results. And if I was wrong (and I have been before, believe me, even after all that), I also trust that God will take my commitment to Him and turn it around for good, somehow, as He promises. (Rom. 8:28)

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:6–7) “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful.” (Col. 3:15) That is walking in the Kingdom, when I have His peace ruling in my heart. In spite of all the turmoil swirling around me, I sense His quiet voice saying, “This is the way. Walk in it.” (Isa. 30:21) And I just do it.

“The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to remembrance all that I said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.” (Jn. 14:26–27)

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” (Jn. 16:33)

Appendix 1 – Names of God

We cannot enter the Kingdom of God without getting to know God at least in limited measure. He has given us His Word for this purpose, but He has also given us many names which at various times He has used to describe Himself. Learning the meanings of these names helps us to know Him.

El – a primitive, generic, prehistoric word for god in the Semitic languages; from possible roots meaning ‘to be strong’ or ‘to be in front of’ or ‘the end of all human seeking’ or ‘the goal for which all men seek’. Equivalent to our ‘god’ in the English language. Also used of false gods: eq. Baal or Ba-el.

Elohim – most frequent and most ancient Hebrew word for God. Plural in form (requires three or more) but singular in construction and usage; thus it implies the Trinity. Also used for false gods, in which cases it is plural both in form and usage. Meaning uncertain, but probably from El with a plurality of magnitude or majesty. Elohim is the name God uses for Himself in Genesis 1, thus has come to mean ‘The Creator God’ in His trinity of person: The Spirit of God brooded over the waters; the worlds were created by the Word of God, Jesus, and God is the Father (the origin) of all creation.

El-Elyon, Jehovah Elyon – God Most High. (Gen. 14:20; Ps. 7:17; 78:35; Daniel 4:34–35) Above all gods in wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. By implication, **omniscient**.

El Roi – The God who Sees [everything, everywhere, and all the time]. (Gen. 16:13) By implication, **omnipresent**.

El Shaddai – Almighty God, the All-sufficient God, the Pourer Forth of Blessings, the Provider God, the ‘Bountiful Breasted One’. (Gen. 17:1; Ex 6:3) By implication, **omnipotent**.

Adonai, Curio, Lord – Master, expressing both authority and nobility, honor, dignity, and majesty. From ‘owner’ meaning the Boss or the King; expressing one who has absolute control. Also plural in form but singular in usage, implying the Trinity. Adonai or Adhonay are Hebrew forms; Curio is the Greek form; Lord is the English form. Scripturally used for either Father or Son in the Trinity.

Yashua, Jehoshua, Jehoshuah, Joshua, Hoshea, Jesus, Yesus – ‘Jehovah Saves’ or ‘Jehovah is our Salvation’. (Matt. 1:21) Yashua is the Hebrew form; Yesus is the Greek form; Joshua and Jesus are the English forms. Scripturally used exclusively for the Son in the Trinity.

Mashiach, haMashiach, Christos, Christ, Messiah – ‘The Anointed One’, ‘God’s Anointed’, or ‘Anointed to be King / Priest’. Mashiach is the Hebrew form; haMashiach is the same with the definite article ‘the’ in front of it, implying that He is the one and only true Messiah, ‘the’ Messiah that the Jews have long expected to come for them; Christos is the Greek form; Christ and Messiah are English forms of the Greek and Hebrew words. In Hebrew usage it also means ‘the Promised One’ or ‘the One who is (to) Come’ or ‘the Long Awaited One’. Jesus uses it of Himself in Lk. 24:46. It is scripturally used for either the Son or the Spirit in the Trinity.

The Lord Jesus Christ (Heb: Adonai Yashua haMashiach; Gk: Curio Yesus Christos) – The most often used name for God among Christians all over the world; combines the above three; nearly all languages use some form or variation of this combination. Commonly used for the Son (Acts 2:36; 10:36), but implies the entire Trinity: the Father (the Lord = the Boss), the Son (Jesus the Savior), and the Holy Spirit (Christ, God’s Anointed One, who anoints His saints to be kings and priests unto Him and rule with Him in the millennial age.)

Jehovah, Jehoyah, Yahoyah, YHWH, Yahweh, Yahvey – The Self-Existent One, the One who in Himself Possesses Essential Life, the Eternal God. (Ex 34:5–7, Heb. 13:8) This comes from the root Hebrew word ‘havah’ which means ‘to be, to (actively, intensely) exist, or to become’ – it can also be translated ‘I Am’ or ‘I Am who I Am’ (Ex 3:13–15). This is generally applied to the eternal Father, as His dwelling place, eternity, is timeless, present in the ‘now’ throughout all time. However, Jesus applied this name to Himself in John 8:58. This is the most important and most sacred name of God. “This is My name forever; and this is My memorial name throughout all generations.” (Ex 3:15) The Jews consider it too holy for common use, therefore they virtually never write it out and almost never speak it. Instead, they use, ‘G-d’ or ‘the LORD’ or ‘haShem’ (meaning ‘the [ineffable] Name’).

No one knows for sure how to pronounce this name, as early Jews removed the vowel points and changed them to the vowels for ‘Adonai’ to prevent the holy Name from ever being misused. So the Hebrew form is now simply the consonants, YHWH. Jehovah is the traditional English equivalent. I think God allowed the pronunciation to be lost so we could each seek His face to ask how He would like us to address Him – and this may change as our intimacy with Him grows!

Jehovah–Jireh – Jehovah will Provide (Gen. 22:14 – used in the story of Abram and Isaac).

Jehovah–Nissi – Jehovah is my Banner (Ex 17:15 – used at Israel’s victory over the Amalekites).

Jehovah–Shalom – Jehovah is [My] Peace (Judg 6:24 – used for the altar Gideon built at Ophra).

Jehovah–Shammah – Jehovah is There (Ezek. 48:35 – used for the heavenly Jerusalem).

Jehovah–Tsidkenu – Jehovah is [Our] Righteousness (Jer. 23:6 and 33:16 – the king who will rule over the restored Israel, and over her capital city, Jerusalem).

Jehovah–Ropheka, Jehovah–Rapha – Jehovah is [Our] Healer, or, the God who Heals (Ex 15:26 – His promise for those who keep His commandments).

Jehovah–Meqaddeshkem (also spelled Mekoddishkem or Mekaddishkem) – Jehovah who Sanctifies [Me] (Ex 31:13 – God gives the Sabbaths as an everlasting sign).

Jehovah–Tsabaoth (also spelled Sabaoth) – Jehovah of Hosts, or the Lord of Hosts. (1 Sam. 1:3; 17:45, when David comes against Goliath in God’s name; also Malachi 1:10, 14, where God uses it for Himself, “...I am a great King, says the Lord of Hosts, and My name is feared among the nations.”)

Jehovah–Elyon – Jehovah Most High (see El-Elyon, above).

Jehovah–Roi (also spelled Raah) – Jehovah is [My] Shepherd, or the God who Watches [over me, leads me, guides me, and protects me] (Ps. 23:1). (See also El Roi, above.)

Ruach or Ruwach, Pneuma – literally, breath or wind. Often scripturally used to imply spirit (as in Gen. 1:2; 6:3; John 3:8). Also used for the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, especially when ‘holy’ is added, as in **Ruach ha Qodesh** (the Hebrew form, Ps. 51:11; Isa. 63:10) and **Pneuma Hagios** (the Greek form (Lk. 11:13; 1 Thess. 4:8). In English usage, capitalization is used to differentiate between the spirit of man or of angels or demons, versus the Spirit of God, but again, adding ‘Holy’ to ‘Spirit’ always refers to God, as He is the only spirit who is truly holy in His essence.

Seek First the Kingdom	Appendix 2 – Class Quiz	Score
I believe the Bible is God's infallible Word, and I consider it the solid foundation of my faith.		
I love God's Word, love to read it, love to hear it, love to memorize and meditate on it. I try to read it daily.		
I seek for the Holy Spirit's illumination, interpretation, and application of God's Word to my heart.		
I try to pray in accord with the Father's will rather than just trying to tell Him what I want Him to do.		
I try to keep in tune with the Holy Spirit. I am sensitive to His quiet voice to my conscience or my soul.		
When I sense the Holy Spirit's prompting or know what the Father wants, I try to take action on it.		
Worship and fellowship with other believers is a joy to me, and I truly love being in God's house.		
A primary goal in my life is to see Jesus' face and hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."		
When the Lord shows me needs in the body, I consider it an opportunity to show my love for Him.		
I know I was a sinner, but Jesus saved me from sin and gave me power to walk with Him in holiness.		
The Kingdom of God is such a treasure to me that I'm willing to give up everything else to obtain it.		
I gladly accept the Lord's discipline, knowing He's teaching me patience, endurance, and faithfulness.		
I try to love others the same way God loves me: unconditionally even when I fail Him and when it costs Him.		
There seems to be so little time before Jesus returns, I feel an urgency to be about My Father's business.		
I take each incident, trouble, or tragedy as an opportunity to learn wisdom and develop God's character.		
My abilities (or lack thereof) are not an issue. I trust God to accomplish through me whatever He wants.		
I love God's Law (especially the Ten Commandments). It shows what God is like and what He wants.		
I'm careful to apply God's law to my own heart, but not to use it to manipulate, judge, or condemn others.		
I accept God's love and forgiveness and refuse Satan's condemnation when I slip and fall into sin.		
My gender-biased perspective is incomplete. I also look to my spouse and others of the opposite gender.		
The life of God's Spirit in me and His living Word flowing through me is as important as my physical life.		
I am aware of Satan as the adversary and accuser of the brethren, but I walk in Jesus' victory over him.		
I resist Satan by drawing near to Jesus, and by "putting on" Jesus as the full armor of God (Eph. 6).		
The law of love in Christ is my joy. I am free from the law of sin and death, so I can live to please Jesus.		
The Sabbath is a special time to tune my heart to the Holy Spirit, giving up my pleasures to do His will.		
I trust the inner witness of the Holy Spirit to my heart, and I wait for His peace before I act.		
On important things, I wait on the Lord for confirmation through His Word, others, or circumstances.		
When God's will (and time) is confirmed, I just do it, trusting God for the ability, means, and results.		
I am committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ over every area of my life, and I actively submit to Him.		
Jesus is Lord over my time, and if He wants me to change my plans, I'm eager to do it.		
Jesus is Lord over my finances, and if He wants me to give money away, I'm eager to do it.		
Jesus is Lord over my possessions, and whatever He wants me to give away, I'm eager to do it.		
Jesus is Lord over my habits, and if He wants me to change them, I'm eager to do it.		
Jesus is Lord over my appetites, and if He wants me to fast or to change my diet, I'm eager to do it.		
Jesus is Lord over my work, and if He wants me to do something else, I'm eager to do it.		
Jesus is Lord over my words, and if He wants to speak through me (or shut me up), I'm eager to do it.		
I am not perfect, but Jesus who lives in me is. I can do all things well through Him and for His glory.		

3	2	1	0	Score
Without reservation.	Help my unbelief.	So I've been told.	I have my own set of beliefs.	
Wholeheartedly.	Most of the time.	Well, I want to anyway.	Bible time is such a chore.	
Always.	Sometimes.	I understand it just fine on my own, thank you.		
Constantly.	For some things.	I don't think we can know the Father's will.		
Always.	Sometimes.	I don't think I've ever heard His promptings.		
Always.	Sometimes.	Let the pastor do it – he gets paid for it.		
Wholeheartedly.	Once a week.	Actually, I come for the gossip time afterwards.		
Yes!	Well, not primary.	Later, Lord, I'm having too much fun right now.		
Enthusiastically.	For my friends.	I s'pose I ought.	I already had other plans.	
By His grace!	Except for a few secret sins.	Sin is fun. I'll wait 'til heaven to be a saint.		
I'm only a steward of the King.		Not 'til they pry it from my cold, dead fingers!		
I trust Him.	Lord, help!	Hey! God's s'posed to keep me healthy and wealthy.		
I have a burden for the lost.		That joker deserves hell if anybody ever did.		
As my first priority.	When I have time.	Well, I've got to make a living and support my family.		
My goal is to be like Him!		I accepted Jesus to solve my problems, not cause 'em!		
He is able!	I try hard.	I just can't seem to get the victory over this.		
I delight in His law!	I try to keep it.	I'm pretty good already	Sounds like legalism to me.	
It's written on my heart.		Hey! I'm a whole lot better than Joe Blow!		
Quickly!	I struggle with it.	I don't fall into sin! I just sorta live real close by.		
No male or female in Christ.		You women siddown and shut up in church!		
I'm eager to feed my spirit.		Spirit life? Spooky. I stick to what I can touch.		
Yes, by faith.	Most of the time.	I feel condemned.	Satan is just symbolic for evil.	
Yes, by faith.	Most of the time.	Wear Jesus? You're puttin' me on!		
Wholeheartedly.	It's my goal.	Yeah, throw out the law so I can do what I please!		
Eagerly.	Sometimes.	That's my day! I go to church Sunday morning.		
Always.	Sometimes.	God gave me a brain. I use it and don't bother Him.		
Until I know His perfect will.		I make my own decision and ask God to bless it.		
Absolutely.	Usually.	God's will?! Wait up! What about my own plans?		
In everything.	Most of the time.	Sure, He is Lord, but I make the final decisions.		
Yes, He is Lord!	I want to submit this to Him.		Wait! That's my time.	
Yes, He is Lord!	I want to submit this to Him.		Wait! That's my money.	
Yes, He is Lord!	I want to submit this to Him.		Wait! That's my gizmo.	
Yes, He is Lord!	I want to submit this to Him.		Wait! That's my hobby.	
Yes, He is Lord!	I want to submit this to Him.		Wait! That's my favorite food.	
Yes, He is Lord!	I want to submit this to Him.		Wait! That's my career.	
Yes, He is Lord!	I want to submit this to Him.		I've got to express my thoughts.	
Right now!	I'm workin' on it.	I'm just a humble sinner, saved by grace.		

Scoring for Class Quiz:

Your score for each of the 37 statements above will be between 0 and 3, which could result in a maximum of 111 points total. Rate yourself as follows:

- 0 – 25: Better take the course again. You need help. Desperately.
- 26 – 50: Do you have one eye on the Kingdom and one eye on the world?
- 51 – 75: Great! Full speed ahead for the Kingdom! You are on your way!
- 76 – 100: Awesome! A true saint by faith. Only, how 'come you're not *teaching* this course?
- above 100: You've got this course down cold. However, may I suggest you take the next courses that come along on humility and honesty?

CONTACT INFORMATION



To order additional copies of this book, please visit
www.redemption-press.com.

Also available on Amazon.com and
BarnsandNoble.com
or by calling toll free 1-844-2REDEEM.

