

INTRODUCTION

God's Plan of Salvation

The central theme of the entire Bible is God's plan of salvation which he brings to fulfillment through his Son, Jesus Christ. This plan, which was foreknown by God before the creation of the world and foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament, is to bring about a family of children who will live in intimate fellowship with God as their Father and share in the glory of his goodness forever. The working out of this plan of salvation is the thread which ties the whole Bible together from beginning to end. It brings unity to its diversity and meaning to its action and thought. The Gospel of John summarizes this plan in words that are known by many the world over:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

The Bible consistently teaches that there are only two possibilities for the final destiny of man: to receive "eternal life" or to "perish." Since man is mortal - subject to death (Rom. 1:23; Rom. 5:12; Heb. 9:27), he has no hope for a life that lasts forever apart from receiving the gift of eternal life from God, who alone is immortal (Rom. 1:23; 1 Tim. 6:16). For those who reject God's

way of salvation, Jesus Christ (John 14:6), the final end or destiny will be to perish after the final judgment. For those, however, who accept Christ there will be a very different destiny - eternal life. For the believer in Christ, this eternal life begins in the present life with the "firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23), and will be brought to its final completion in the paradise of the kingdom of God after Christ's second coming (I Cor. 15:20-28).

Defining the Terms

In the Bible the terms "salvation," "eternal life" and "kingdom of God" are closely related to each other and are often used as almost interchangeable expressions (cp. Luke 18:18-30; John 3:1-18). The word "salvation" is a comprehensive term. It includes the idea of deliverance from something as well as the result of that deliverance. When speaking of the eternal salvation of man it refers to being saved from sin, its consequences, and the final condemnation of the ungodly at the last judgment. As a result, instead of being condemned to perish, the believer in Christ will receive the gift of eternal life.

Biblically, the term "eternal life" refers to "the life of the coming age."¹ The Bible speaks of this present period of time in which we live as the "present evil age" (Gal. 1:4). It is influenced for the most part by the "god of this age," Satan, and his spiritual kingdom of darkness (II Cor. 4:4; Eph. 6:10-12; I John 5:19). Though God is still ultimately sovereign over all (Psalm 103:19), the Bible teaches that this world is fundamentally in rebellion against God (Eph. 2:1-3). After Christ's second coming, however, God's enemies will be destroyed and a new age will be ushered in - the age of the kingdom of God. In this new coming age God's righteous and loving rule will be established "on earth as it is in heaven" for God's kingdom will finally have "come" (Matt 6:9-10). This kingdom will be a "paradise" (Rev. 2:7) consisting of "a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (II Pet.

3:13; Rev. 21:1ff). It will be everlasting in duration and those who live within it will have the "eternal life" of the coming age. This eternal life will be a life that is "immortal" and "imperishable" (I Cor. 15:53-54), for it will be life in a kingdom whose origin is "not of this world" (John 18:36) - a paradise where all of God's people will enjoy forever "the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21).

The Biblical Perspective

Understanding the biblical concept of salvation should enable the Christian believer to live this present life within the proper spiritual framework that the Bible presents. Our central point of focus should be Christ's future second coming and the final establishment of God's kingdom. As believers in Christ our daily lives should be lived with the certainty that godly living in this life will be rewarded at Christ's future appearing (Col. 3:23-24; Titus 2:11-14). For though the Bible offers the believer in Christ promises for the present life (I Tim. 4:8), it remains true that the fullness of eternal life will only be received in the life that is to come after Christ's second coming (I Tim. 6:18-19). Until that time Christians are still subject to the sufferings of this world - even death - because we have mortal, perishable bodies and live in the midst of a great spiritual battle (Eph. 6:12). Though Christians have the assurance of ultimate victory, it is only at Christ's second coming that the "perishable will clothe itself with the imperishable" and "the mortal with immortality" so that death will finally be "swallowed up in victory" (I Cor. 15:50-57). Until that time, the believer in Christ can enjoy salvation with the "firstfruits of the Spirit" and with the full assurance that "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

The Purpose of This Booklet

It is my prayer that this booklet will help the interested reader to better understand God's gift of salvation which is today freely available through faith in Christ. The reader is invited to either read the booklet straight through in order to gain a basic understanding of the subject or to do a more detailed study by looking up the verse references and end-notes. It is hoped that the material presented will inspire further study on this and related topics. Although our understanding is limited today, the Bible promises that at Christ's second coming we will no longer "see but a poor reflection as in a mirror," but, instead, we will see Christ "face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). Then, we will no longer know only "in part" but "fully even as we are fully known" (I Cor. 13:12). Then, and only then, we will enjoy God's salvation in all its fullness - eternal life in the paradise of God's kingdom forever.

CHAPTER 1

The Promise of Salvation

The Bible declares that before the heavens and earth were ever created God already existed "from everlasting to everlasting" (Psalm 90:2). He is, therefore, the eternal God, "the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see ..." (I Tim. 6:15-16). As the eternal God whose kingdom "rules over all" (Psalm 103:19), God's ways are higher than our ways and his thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:9). In fact, the Bible declares that God's judgments are "unsearchable" and his paths "beyond tracing out" (Rom. 11:33). Man is, therefore, limited in his understanding about the "whys" and "wherefores" of God, his ways and his creation. God has not, however, left us without a guide for this life. For he has revealed "everything we need for life and godliness" (II Pet. 1:3) within the Bible, the God-inspired Scriptures (II Tim. 3:14-17). It is here in the holy Scriptures, which are able to make us "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (II Tim. 3:15), that God has graciously revealed to us his reasons for creation, his plan of salvation and his ultimate purposes for those who love him.

In the Beginning

The Bible clearly teaches that God's eternal purpose and plan were "destined for our glory before time began" (I Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:3-5, 9-11). The creation of the heavens and earth was not, therefore, an arbitrary event which simply happened by chance, nor did the world mysteriously evolve out of nothing. Instead, the Bible declares that the heavens and earth were created by a sovereign, loving and all wise God who acted according to his own divine purpose and will (Gen. 1-2; Prov. 8:22-31; Job 38-41; Isaiah 40-43). The first two chapters of the Book of Genesis show that the whole created order of the heavens and earth, as well as all that was within them, had a set purpose and proper relationship with its creator, God. Simply put, the heavens and all the celestial bodies (sun, moon and stars) were made in relationship to the earth (Gen. 1:14-15). The earth with all its physical elements, plant life and animal life was made to be ruled and enjoyed by man (Gen. 1:26; I Tim. 6:17). And man, created in God's own image, was created to glorify God and to walk in intimate fellowship with him (Gen. 1:26-27; Acts 17:24-28). In short, everything that God created was very good, fit within the divine order of his plan and redounded to his own glory (Gen. 1:31; Psalm 19:1; Rom. 1:20).

The Original Paradise

After God's creation had been completed, God placed the first man (Adam) and the first woman (Eve) in the original paradise of the garden of Eden. There he abundantly supplied them with all they needed for a life of fellowship with him. But he also gave them the freedom to either enjoy this abundance in harmony with his will or to disobey him and reap the consequences of that rebellion. Genesis chapter two gives us the details:

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "you are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Gen. 2:15-17).

Unfortunately, man and woman under the influence of Satan (the serpent, cf. Gen. 3:1; Rev. 12:8), chose to sin against God's command. The consequences of this decision were cataclysmic for both mankind and the entire created order. Sin and death entered the world and, as a result, all of life was thrown into turmoil. Hardship, sickness and death became the constant foes of all humanity (Gen. 3:7-19). Creation itself fell into "bondage to decay" and continues to the present time "groaning as in the pains of childbirth" (Rom. 8:21-22). From that day forward mankind's intimate fellowship with God was broken. In fact, all who were born into the world from that time onward were spiritually "dead in sin" (Eph. 2:1) with physical death the common fate awaiting all (Rom. 5:12-14).

The Promise of Paradise Restored

The sovereign God whose "throne is in the heavens" (Psalm 103:19) and who "lives forever" (Isaiah 57:15) was not, however, defeated. For in his infinite wisdom he had foreseen the events which would occur. Thus, he set in motion his plan of the ages to bring about the ultimate redemption and salvation of all those who love him. The first great biblical promise of this is recorded in the Book of Genesis, chapter three, as God pronounced doom upon "the serpent" and ultimate victory to God's people:

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel (Gen. 3:15).

Here, in the colorful language of the Hebrew people, the spiritual battle of the ages to follow is predicted. Satan and his forces of evil will be constantly at enmity with God and his people throughout history. And yet, though the serpent will "strike the heel" of the woman's "offspring," the day will come when "he" (the woman's offspring) will "crush the head" of the serpent. This verse is a wonderful promise for the people of God. For the Bible reveals this promised offspring of the woman to ultimately be fulfilled in Jesus Christ - the promised redeemer. This promise is, therefore, the assurance that through Christ, "the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom. 16:20). When this occurs, the cause of man's oppression will finally be destroyed and a new and everlasting paradise will be established forever.

Old Testament Promises

Throughout the history of the Old Testament the faithful people of God looked forward to the day when God would send his promised savior or redeemer to restore his people to their original and destined purpose with God (Luke 24:27, 44; Acts 3:17-26; John 8:56). These faithful people lived by faith in the promises of God. Though living in this world they were, through the eyes of faith, looking forward to "a better country - a heavenly one" (Heb. 11:16) and to a "city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10).² And yet, despite having persevered in faith, all of these Old Testament believers died not having yet received these promises (Heb. 11:13). For the day in the timetable of God's plan had not yet arrived for the promises to be fulfilled (Heb. 11:39-40).

As the history of the faithful people of God continued through the later stages of the Old Testament the vision of this coming kingdom or paradise became even clearer and was foretold by "all the prophets" (Acts 3:17-26). Examples of these prophecies can be found in the Old Testament Books of Isaiah and

Daniel. Isaiah spoke of a coming ruler whose righteous kingdom would reign forever:

For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever (Isaiah 9:6-7).³

The prophet Daniel also spoke of a coming everlasting kingdom. A kingdom to be brought to pass by "one like a son of man" and which would replace all other kingdoms and rule so as to establish God's righteous rule forever:

In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed ... it will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever (Daniel 2:44).

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven ... He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed (Daniel 7:13-17).⁴

This everlasting kingdom of righteousness and peace eventually came to be summed up by the one term - "the kingdom of God."⁵ The many titles of its future ruler were also summed up in one term - the "Messiah" or "Christ" - God's anointed Savior and King.⁶ It was on this biblical promise of the coming Christ and the glorious everlasting kingdom of God which he was to establish that all the hopes of the Old Testament faithful rested. For then, and only then, would their God whom they loved "wipe away the tears from all faces," "remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth" and "swallow up death forever" (Isaiah 25:8).

CHAPTER 2

The Promise Fulfilled

The Birth of Christ

When, in the plan of God, "the time had fully come" (Gal. 4:4), Jesus Christ, the promised Savior and King, was miraculously conceived by the power of God's holy Spirit and then born into the world (Luke 1:26-2:38). Though the faithful people of God within the Jewish nation were looking expectantly for his coming, much confusion existed as to who this "Messiah" or "Christ" would be and as to what kind of kingdom he would establish. Some four hundred years had passed since the last Old Testament Book of Malachi and during this inter-testamental period the Jewish people had been in captivity to the Persian, Greek and, finally, Roman Empires. As a result, many of the Jewish people of that time were looking for a Messiah or King who would immediately deliver them from their political captivity to Rome and establish a kingdom that would restore Israel to its heights of glory which it had once held under the kingdom of David in the Old Testament. Jesus was to show, however, that there was much more to his mission than this. For Christ came first and foremost to bring spiritual deliverance to mankind by destroying the work of the Devil (I John 3:8), thus making possible man's reconciliation back to his proper and intended relationship

with God (II Cor. 5:18-19). Only after this was accomplished would he be able to come again in power and glory to establish the paradise of God's kingdom in a new heaven and new earth where righteousness would dwell.

The Good News of the Kingdom of God

Jesus began his public ministry at the age of thirty after being anointed with the power of the holy Spirit (Luke 3:21-23; 4:16-21). At that time he made it his chief mission to proclaim, expound and demonstrate the true nature of the coming kingdom of God which he was to establish. All four of the Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - show this. Look, for example, at the Gospels of Mark and Luke:

'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent [turn to God] and believe the good news!' (Mark 1:15).

At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said, 'I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.' And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea (Luke 4:42-44).

Jesus stated that he was sent by God to preach the "good news of the kingdom of God." Why was it good news? Because Jesus, as the anointed Messiah, promised salvation and eternal life in the paradise of God's coming kingdom to all who repented and believed in him. In addition, he also demonstrated the love, power and deliverance of God's kingdom by many miraculous healings. In this way the power of the kingdom of God was already present in Jesus, the Messiah, before the kingdom itself was established in a restored earth as had been foretold by all the prophets. This

mighty display of God's love and power was a foretaste of all that God's coming kingdom was to be. It also showed the stark contrast between the goodness of God's kingdom and the oppression of Satan's spiritual kingdom which had engulfed the world since the time of Adam. Look at the following verses:

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people (Matt. 4:23).

Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, 'it is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.' Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, 'Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' (Matt. 12:22-28).

Jesus' healings were an invasion of the power of the kingdom of God, which was then in heaven, into the realm of Satan and his kingdom of darkness in the world.⁷ Since the time of Adam's sin this spiritual darkness and evil had engulfed the entire world (I John 5:19). Only where God's will was done and God's Spirit displayed in power did the light of God's kingdom penetrate and dispel this spiritual darkness of Satan's kingdom. The Book of Acts summarizes Jesus' entire ministry in the light of this spiritual battle as he delivered people from the oppression of the devil:

... how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went about doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him (Acts 10:38).

Here we see the key point that had been missing in the understanding of the people of Jesus' day. Their problems and oppression were not due to the Romans, Greeks or Persians who had held them in captivity. Instead, the root cause of their oppression was spiritual. Satan and his spiritual kingdom of evil had, since Adam's day, deceived the world and brought sin, sickness and death into it. The whole world was lying in the web of its spiritual deception and oppression. Until the spiritual causes of man's dilemma were defeated and overcome, God's kingdom could not come in all of its power and glory.

The True Nature of the Kingdom of God

Jesus, therefore, opened up the spiritual understanding of his followers. Though God's kingdom would one day fill a new heaven and a new earth, it would not be a political kingdom based on the worldly standards of this age. Instead, it would be a spiritual kingdom – that is, a kingdom whose origin “is not of this world” (John 18:36). To enter, or inherit, that future kingdom a person must be born again of God's Spirit (John 3:1-16; I John 5:1). For as the Apostle Paul was later to state, "... flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor. 15:50). At the time of Christ's future second coming all of God's faithful people from all generations will be raised and transformed so as to have a share, or inheritance, in this new world to come. In short, the kingdom of God which is to come will necessitate a whole new order of things where the mortal will become immortal, the perishable become imperishable and the entire creation "delivered from its bondage to decay" (Rom. 8:18-21; I Cor. 15:35-54; Rev. 21:1f). Jesus called this the "making new" or "regeneration" of all things and promised

that his followers would be rewarded in that age to come for their faithful service in this life (Matt. 19:28-29; Luke 18:29-30).

Christ had also taught, however, that in order to enter the kingdom of God a person's righteousness must "surpass that of the Pharisees" (Matt. 5:20), for God's holiness required perfection (Matt. 5:48). However, since man was unable to attain such perfection on his own (Matt. 19:16-26; Rom. 3:23), it was necessary that Jesus give his own life as the ransom sacrifice for man's sins - the righteous for the unrighteous (I Pet. 3:18) - so that man could receive righteousness, not by his own merit, but as a gift from God through faith in Christ (Rom. 3:21-26; 5:15-19). As Jesus himself stated, " ...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28).

The Two-fold Purpose of Christ

It was therefore for the purpose of doing for sinful man what he was incapable of doing for himself that Christ had come into the world. As the savior of the world, the perfect man,⁸ it was necessary for him to first defeat the spiritual causes of man's oppression and separation from God: sin, death and Satan. Only after this could he come again in power and glory to bring about salvation in all its fullness by destroying God's enemies and establishing forever the kingdom of God in a new heaven and new earth where righteousness would dwell.

Though this two-fold purpose of Christ - his sufferings on behalf of mankind and his future glory - had both been foretold in the Old Testament, the first part was not understood by the people of Jesus' day - not even by his closest followers (Luke 18:31-34). It was only after his sacrificial death and then resurrection that Jesus was finally able to open the understanding of his disciples so that they could realize the significance of his crucifixion and

resurrection (Luke 24:44-47). As the "lamb of God" who was to "take away the sins of the world" (John 1:29) Jesus freely gave up his own life as the ransom payment for the sins of all mankind (II Cor. 5:21; I Pet. 1:18-21; Isaiah 53). On the third day God raised him from the dead gaining victory over sin, death and Satan for all of God's people. After his resurrection Christ then appeared to his chosen disciples and taught them about the significance of his death and the glory of God's kingdom to come (Luke 24:44-47; Acts 1:1-11). He then ascended into heaven where as the exalted Lord over God's people he poured out the gift of holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost upon all who believed in him. On that same day, after receiving the gift of holy Spirit, the apostle Peter set forth a summary of the events that had just taken place in fulfillment of the plan of God:

Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'

Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:22-24, 32-36).

Jesus freely gave up his life as a sacrificial offering on behalf of mankind. In doing this he paid the ransom price for man's sins and made possible a new covenant⁹ relationship between God and man. No longer does sin have to keep man separated from his proper relationship with God. Because of Christ's sacrificial death, resurrection, ascension into heaven and his giving of the holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, it is now possible for man to be reconciled to God and to enjoy the blessings of salvation already in this present age. The following verses explain the significance of these events and the resulting new covenant relationship between God and man:

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation (Rom. 5:6-11).

For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance - now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant (Heb. 9:15).

In solving the problem of sin Jesus also made possible freedom from the bondage of death and, therefore, from the oppression of Satan himself. For it was because of sin that death

had come into the world and Satan had gained power over mankind (Rom. 5:12). By his sacrificial death and then resurrection Jesus broke the power of death and destroyed Satan's hold on mankind. The NT Letters to the Hebrews and Corinthians explain:

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil - and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death (Heb. 2:14-15).

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits, then when he comes, those who belong to him (I Cor. 15:20-23).

Christ is the "firstfruits" of those who have fallen asleep; therefore, his resurrection is the guarantee that all who believe in him will also one day be resurrected to share fully in the eternal life of the coming age. With the death and resurrection of Christ, along with his giving of the holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the end of human history in this present evil age has already begun.¹⁰ The spiritual cause of man's oppression, Satan, has already been defeated and his future doom awaits only the second coming of Christ. As the "firstborn from the dead" (Col. 1:18), Christ is the beginning of a new people of God (Rom. 8:28-30) - called out from every nation, family or race upon earth. Those who believe in Christ are now born of God's Spirit becoming children in God's family and a part of his new covenant people - the church of the body of Christ. This Spirit, which the people of God now receive, is the "power of the coming age" (Heb. 6:5) and the "firstfruits" (Rom. 8:23) or "down payment" (Eph. 1:13-14) of the full harvest

of eternal life which will be received at Christ's second coming. In short, the victory has already been won for God's people and history is now moving towards a known climactic end - the second coming of Christ and the final establishment of God's kingdom (I Cor. 15:20-28).

It is precisely this biblical perspective that dominates all of the New Testament writings from the day of Pentecost onwards. Christ now reigns¹¹ at God's right hand in heaven and gives salvation, through the Spirit, to all who come to God through him (Heb. 7:22-25). However, even though his reign as Lord and Christ has already begun, it will not be fully consummated until the time of his second coming when all his enemies will be destroyed and God's kingdom will be established "on earth as it is in heaven." The time period between the first and second comings of Christ is the new age of the Spirit - that is, the age of the new covenant relationship which Christ has established between God and his people (II Cor. 3:6). For with the giving of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost the blessings of God's future salvation have already begun - even in the midst of this present evil age. Because of this overlap of the ages (I Cor. 10:11), this period of time between Christ's first and second comings is sometimes called "the last days" (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; etc.), "the last times" (I Pet. 1:20) or "the ends of the ages" (I Cor. 10:11; Heb. 9:26). But it is also called the "day of salvation" (II Cor. 6:2), because it is the period of time in which the salvation made possible through Christ's first coming is now being offered to the world (Acts 1:6-8). For those who choose to accept it, the blessings of this salvation begin already in this present life and will be received in all their fullness at Christ's second coming. The Book of Hebrews summarizes the greatness of this two-fold purpose of Christ and the fullness of salvation which awaits those who believe in him:

... But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself

.... and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him (Heb. 9:26-28).

CHAPTER 3

Salvation by Grace: the Gift of God

As a result of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven to be Lord over God's people a new era has begun in God's plan of salvation for mankind. A new covenant relationship has been established between God and his people. No longer is God's relationship with his people based upon the imperfect sacrifices, rituals or legal code of the Old Testament Mosaic Law. Instead, it is based upon the perfect "once for all time" sacrifice of Christ and is "sealed" by the Spirit of the living God which is given to all of God's people (Heb. 9:15; II Cor. 3:6; Eph. 1:13-14). Those who believe in Jesus Christ, accepting him as their Lord, are born of God's Spirit becoming children in God's family and members of the church of the body of Christ. As a result, God's new covenant people are now able to know God as their own personal Father and to worship him "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21-24; Eph. 2:18-22; Phil. 3:3). For believers in Christ, therefore, the blessings of salvation begin in this present life and will be brought to their glorious completion in the life of the coming age at Christ's second coming. The Book of Romans tells us specifically how God's gift of salvation may be received in this age of the new covenant in which we live:

That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved (Rom. 10:9-10).

Salvation is received by confessing with your mouth that "Jesus is Lord" and believing in your heart that "God raised him from the dead." In these verses the words "confess" and "believe" are simply two sides of the same coin. To "confess" that "Jesus is Lord" is to state outwardly what you believe to be true inwardly. To "believe" that "God raised him from the dead" is to accept this testimony of God's word as being true and then to trust or hold to it within your life. This belief and confession are based on the freewill decision of each individual believer and mark the beginning of a lifetime relationship of living in faith under Christ's lordship.

Biblically, Jesus is Lord because as the Son of God he died for our sins purchasing us for himself and then was raised to life by God to rule as Lord over God's people and creation. The Book of Acts explains:

God has raised this Jesus to life and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

'The Lord [God] said to my Lord [Christ]:
'Sit at my right hand until I make your
enemies a footstool for your feet.'

Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:32-36).

Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Christ by dying for our sins and then being raised from the dead. He was then exalted to God's right hand in heaven and "enthroned" as Lord and Christ in fulfillment of Psalm 110. There he will "reign" until the time, in God's eternal plan, when he will come again to bring complete salvation for God's people, destroy God's enemies and establish God's kingdom forever (I Cor. 15:20-28).

It should be understood that the terms "Lord," "Christ" and "Son of God" are all messianic titles which refer to the same essential truths in the Bible. "Lord" means "ruler or master." "Christ" means "God's anointed Savior and King." And the term "Son of God," when speaking of Jesus, refers to the one born by divine conception and then sent by God to fulfill all the Old Testament prophecies concerning the promised Messiah or Christ. All of these terms can, therefore, be used almost interchangeably because when we speak of Jesus as "Lord," "Christ" or "Son of God" we are speaking of the same person. Compare the following verses:

Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved ...
(Acts 16:31).

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born
of God (I John 5:1).

I write these things to you who believe in the name of
the Son of God so that you may know that you have
eternal life (I John 5:13).

These are all different ways of expressing the same essential truths. If we choose to believe this testimony concerning Christ, the biblical promise is that we will be "saved," "born of God" and have "eternal life."

By Grace You Have Been Saved

Salvation, or eternal life, is a gift from God to man. It is not something that we can work to earn nor is it something that we deserve because of our own inherent worthiness. All men have sinned and fall short of God's perfect standard of righteousness (Eph. 2:1; Rom. 3:23; James 2:10). This is precisely why Christ came and gave himself as the ransom sacrifice on behalf of all mankind. By his sacrificial death he paid the price for the sins of all people for all time (I John 2:2). Those who choose to accept him receive the benefits of this - the gift of eternal life. Look at Romans:

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:23).

Sin pays a wage and that wage is death. Since all men have sinned the Bible says that all men will also one day die (Rom. 5:12; Heb. 9:27). Simply put, man is mortal and not even all the wonders of medical science can solve this, the greatest of all problems. But this is precisely what God has done through Christ. For Christ is the firstborn from the dead, guaranteeing that all who believe in him will also receive the gift of immortality at his second coming (I Cor. 15:51-54).

The Books of Romans and Ephesians emphasize the truth that salvation is a gift from God and cannot be earned either by works of religious ritual or by good works of service to others. Instead, salvation is received through faith - a humble trust in God and his Son:

Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work, but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness (Rom. 4:4-5).

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph. 2:8-10).

If righteousness, or salvation, could be earned by working for it then some would be able to boast before God about their goodness. However, the Bible clearly teaches that no one can be good enough to attain salvation through their own merit because we all fall short. Good works in a Christian's life are the *fruit* of salvation, not the means to attaining it. Salvation is totally by grace; undeserved divine favor from God to man. This absolutely rules out any possibility for man by his own works to be good enough to earn salvation. As the Apostle Paul states:

And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace (Rom. 11:6).

Paul elaborates even further on this subject in another section of the Book of Romans:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:21-24).

Through believing in Jesus Christ we are forgiven of our sins and justified, or made righteous, in God's sight. This is a result of Christ's sacrificial death in which he redeemed us, or set us free, by paying the ransom price for our sins. Therefore, this righteousness and salvation are now available to all who desire to

receive it through faith in Christ (Rom. 10:9-10). All of this is by grace. Why? Because "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Therefore, we all need a savior, and when we accept him, the same gift of righteousness, salvation or eternal life is given to all.¹²

Salvation: Present and Future

After the day of Pentecost, when the gift of holy Spirit was first given, the New Testament speaks of two aspects of God's gift of salvation: present and future. Believers in Christ have already "been saved" (Eph. 2:8) and yet they have not yet received the fullness of "the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (I Pet. 1:5). When a person believes in Christ he is born of God's Spirit (John 1:12-13; 3:1-8; I John 5:1), becomes a child in God's family (Rom 8:16; Gal. 4:4-7) and a citizen of God's kingdom (Eph. 2:18-19, Phil. 3:20). In addition, the believer is incorporated into Christ through the Spirit and becomes a member of the church of the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:12-13, 27). In Christ, the believer is also redeemed, justified and righteous in God's sight (I Cor. 6:11; Rom. 8:10; I Cor. 1:30). All of this is a result of the believer receiving the "firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23), because the gift of the Spirit is a "deposit, guaranteeing our inheritance" in the future kingdom of God (Eph. 1:13-14; I Cor. 15:50ff; II Cor. 1:21-22, 5:5).¹³ Therefore, the believer in Christ is able to enjoy already, in part, the blessings of God's salvation which will one day come in all of their fullness. Let's look at some examples of how the New Testament Letters speak of both the present and future aspects of salvation:

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through

Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:4-7).

Here we see clearly both the present and future aspects of God's gift of salvation. As believers in Christ we are already saved and justified but we also still have the hope of future eternal life. Look at the Letter of I John which also elaborates on this theme:

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! ... Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he [Christ] appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (I John 3:1-2).

We are already God's children! And yet, there is something much greater to come in the future when Christ "appears a second time" (Heb. 9:28). For then we will see Christ "face to face" (I Cor. 13:12) and be instantaneously changed to "be like him." Let's look at one more example of this "already" but "not yet" life of the believer:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Phil. 3:20-21).

We are already, by way of the Spirit, citizens of God's kingdom which is now in heaven, but the day is coming when Christ will come again to establish God's kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:9-10). At that time all believers will inherit the kingdom of God and our "lowly bodies" will be transformed to become like Christ's "glorious body" (I Cor. 15:50-57). That is

the Christian hope; for though even now we are the children of God, we still "groan" in these mortal bodies waiting for the time when mortality will be "swallowed up by life" and we receive "the redemption of our bodies" (II Cor. 5:1-8; Rom. 8:22-23).

The Second Coming of Christ

The Bible is absolutely clear on the truth that the second coming of Christ is the one and only hope of Christianity. It is only then that believers in Christ will be transformed from mortality to immortality so as to enjoy forever "the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21). The Book of I Corinthians gives the details of this incredible transformation which will take place for all of God's people - whether dead or alive - at Christ's glorious second coming:

I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep [die], but we will all be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true:

'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'
'Where, O death is your victory?' Where, O
death is your sting?'

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (I Cor. 15:50-57).

We are already the people of God - children in his family and citizens of his kingdom. But the fullness of eternal life will not be ours until "death has been swallowed up in victory." When, then, will this take place? At death? No! Only at the second coming of Christ and not before. Death is an enemy that must be defeated (I Cor. 15:26), not a friend which brings us into immortality with Christ. Believers in Christ who die are said to be "asleep in Christ" and their *next conscious thought* will be their "awakening" to immortality at Christ's second coming. They will then be raised to meet him in the air so as to be with him - from that moment on - forever.¹⁴ The First Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians pinpoints this climactic moment in God's plan of salvation:

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever (I Thess. 4:13-17).

When will believers be with Christ forever? Only at Christ's glorious second coming and not before. It is that moment, therefore, that must be the focal point of all Christian hope and expectation. For then, and only then, will mortality be "swallowed up by life" (II Cor. 5:4). Then, and only then, will believers "inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor. 15:50; II Thess. 1:1-10). And

then, and only then, will God's eternal purpose in Christ - destined for our glory before time began - be fulfilled in all its glory (Rom. 8:18-30; Eph. 1:9-10; I Cor. 15:20-28, 50-58).¹⁵

Who Can Be Saved?

Many times sincere Christians do not think they are worthy of such grace. They feel that they are so bad that most certainly God could not accept and forgive them. But this is the whole point of why Christ came and died for us. We must always remember that salvation is the free gift of God - available to all whom will accept it - because of the sacrifice of Christ on behalf of all mankind. The Apostle Paul speaks directly to this issue:

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the worst. But for this very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life (I Tim. 1:15-16).

Paul knew that if there was ever anyone undeserving of God's salvation then surely it was him. For despite his great learning and rigorous adherence to the religious traditions of Judaism, he was in fact greatly deceived before the time he accepted Christ (Phil. 3:2-9; Titus 3:1-7); so deceived, in fact, that he had zealously persecuted, even to death, believers in Christ. And yet God in his wonderful grace and mercy had forgiven Paul. This incredible "salvation by grace" serves as an example of Christ's "unlimited patience" in waiting for people to recognize their need for him as their savior and to accept his gracious offer of eternal life. The Bible calls this decisive change in a person's heart and life "repentance." It is the recognition of one's unworthy life and a turning to God for the salvation which he freely gives

through faith in Christ. It is God's desire "for all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4). He does not wish for any to perish but to come to repentance (II Pet. 3:9). Therefore, the invitation continuously goes out to all in this day of salvation:

'In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you. I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation' (II Cor. 6:2).

Now truly is the time, for "our Savior, Christ Jesus has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (II Tim. 1:10). Let us therefore accept this gift of salvation which God has made available through his Son. The Letter of I John sums up the choice that stands before us all and the gift that can freely be ours by faith:

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life (I John 5:11-13).

CHAPTER 4

The New Creation in Christ

When a person believes in Jesus Christ, accepting him as his risen Lord, he is born of God and spiritually created in Christ Jesus. As a result, this new believer identifies with Christ in all of Christ's accomplishments: past, present and future. "In Christ" the believer has already been judged as to his spiritual standing before God and the verdict is "not guilty" (Rom. 8:1; I Cor. 1:30). This is not because of the believer's own righteousness but because of Christ's sacrificial death and the resulting gift of righteousness which God gives, or credits, to believers on the basis of grace (Rom. 3:21-5:17). The Book of Ephesians speaks about this new creation in Christ:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph. 2:8-10).

Being created in Christ Jesus is the work of God, not man. It is a spiritual creation, not physical, and is accomplished by a believer being born of God's Spirit and incorporated through that

Spirit into the spiritual body of Christ, the church of God. The Letters of Ephesians and I and II Corinthians explain this truth:

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession - to the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:13-14).

The body is a unit, although it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink (I Cor. 12:12-13).

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has gone, the new has come! (II Cor. 5:17).

For the believer in Christ all things have become new because he is now a new creation in Christ. He has been baptized with the Spirit, not water, into the one body of Christ. As a result, the believer stands before God clothed with the righteousness, holiness and redemption that have been made possible by Christ's death and resurrection. All of this is God's own work of grace which he imparts to us, in Christ, through the Spirit. As Paul says:

You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (I Cor. 6:11).

It is because of him [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God - that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption (I Cor. 1:30).

Christ died for us and paid the ransom price for the sins of all mankind (I Tim. 2:4-6). When we accept this sacrificial death of Christ for us by believing in him as our risen Lord, we receive the benefits of all that he accomplished for us. The gift of "righteousness" means that we have been justified, or acquitted of our sins, and therefore stand in a new right relationship with God: accepted and at peace with him (Rom. 4:23-5:2). The word "holy" means that we have been set apart for God and are now God's "saints" or "holy people" with our citizenship in heaven (Eph. 2:19; Phil.3:20).¹⁶ The word "redemption" means that we have been bought back and set free from the spiritual bondage of sin and of Satan's realm of darkness and transferred into the dominion of Christ's kingdom or rule (Col. 1:13-14).

This redemptive work of Christ on our behalf is a truth that every believer should understand. It is through Christ's work that we are redeemed, not through our own work. As a result of believing in Christ and being incorporated into him, we identify with him in all that he did, is doing, and will do on our behalf. The following list shows our spiritual identification with Christ in all of his accomplishments:

"In Christ" we as believers:

were crucified with him (Gal. 2:20),

died with him (Rom. 6:3),

were buried with him (Rom. 6:4),

were made alive with him (Eph. 2:5),

were raised up with him (Eph. 2:6),

are seated in heaven with him (Eph. 2:6),

will appear with him in glory (Col. 3:4).

It is precisely because of this spiritual identification of the believer with Christ in all of his accomplishments that we now stand before God clothed in the righteousness, holiness and redemption that are ours in Christ.

Biblically, Christ is *the* elect or chosen one of God in whom all of God's purposes are accomplished (e.g. Isa. 42:1; Luke 9:35; Eph. 1:1-14). All who are incorporated into Christ - through faith and the Spirit - become a part of God's elect or chosen people and thus share with Christ in all of God's purposes "for those who love him" (Rom. 8:28; I Cor. 2:9; James 2:5). This is all in accordance with God's foreordained plan. In fact, the Book of Ephesians shows that God actually chose us in Christ before the creation of the world in order that we would become his children and live in intimate fellowship with him:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him [Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will - to the praise of his glorious grace which he has freely given us in the One he loves (Eph. 1:3-6).

God chose and predestined us to be his children before the creation of the world. This was his plan of salvation. God knew that man would sin and in his wisdom and love he prepared a plan so that through his Son, Jesus Christ, we could be redeemed back to him. In his wisdom, God knew that people would believe. Therefore in his love, he made it such that when we did believe we would become his children. God's choice and predestination of us, therefore, is based on his own foreknowledge of a people who would believe but with no interference in our freedom to choose. It was our decision to believe. God simply predestined the results

of that belief - for us to become his children! The Book of Romans summarizes these wonderful truths in God's plan of salvation:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then shall we say in response to this: If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

'For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be
slaughtered.'

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:28-39).

In Christ Jesus we are God's children. Foreknown before the creation of the world. Called to be his own chosen people. Justified so as to be righteous and blameless before him. And, even though Christ has not yet returned, already assured of appearing with him in glory.

The People of God

All true believers in Jesus Christ together make up the one family of God and the one church of the body of Christ. This is a spiritual family and spiritual church which transcends every man-made denomination, division or sect. The Spirit of God binds all believers in Christ into a new people of God united above and beyond all worldly distinctions. This collective sense of being the new people of God is stated in many different ways within the New Testament Letters. Sometimes Old Testament imagery (e.g. the temple of God) is used to describe God's people while at other times completely different and new terminology (e.g. the body of Christ) is introduced to describe the new spiritual realities that exist under the new covenant. Look at the Old Testament imagery used in the Book of I Peter:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God (I Pet. 2:9-10).

In the Old Testament the nation of Israel was the called and chosen people of God. The New Testament, however, reveals that because of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and his giving of the holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost a new covenant relationship has been established between God and his people. Now all who believe in Christ - irrespective of ethnic, social or religious

background - are part of the new covenant people of God (cp. Matt. 21:33-43; I Pet. 2:4-10; etc.). As Paul says:

It is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus and who put no confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:3; cp. Gal. 6:16).

This is simply Old Testament language being applied to the new covenant people of God. All that was promised in the Old Testament to God's covenant people, Israel, now becomes the rightful inheritance of God's new covenant people in a way far greater than the Old Testament people ever saw or conceived. This is all a result of the work of Christ and the giving of God's gift of holy Spirit to all who believe in Christ. Look at the following verses from the Book of Ephesians:

For through him [Christ] we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him [Christ] the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Eph. 2:18-22).

What magnificent truths! We are fellow citizens with all of God's people regardless of ethnic race or national boundaries. We are united together in a citizenship that transcends and supersedes the national citizenships of this world. Our allegiance is therefore first and foremost to God and his kingdom. No national, ethnic or family allegiance can ever take priority over that.¹⁷ We are members of God's household - bound together in God's family by his Spirit of which we are born. In fact, so great is this new relationship with God that the Bible teaches that we, as God's

chosen people, are now the temple of the living God. God, the creator of the heavens and the earth, now lives in us by way of his Spirit!

One in Christ

Throughout the New Testament this new special relationship of God with his people is emphasized over and over along with the love and care that God's people are to have for each other. In Old Testament times it was often thought that only Israelites or converts to the religion of Israel could be part of God's people. Gentiles, i.e., all of the other ethnic groups of the world, were thought to be impure and unclean. Though it was foretold in the Old Testament that these Gentiles would one day be blessed by God, it was never thought that they would be accepted as part of the people of God on an equal basis with Israel. However, as a result of the life, death and resurrection of Christ and then his giving of the holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost all barriers dividing God's people have been forever broken down (Eph. 2:11-18). Look at the Letters to the Galatian and Corinthian churches:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26-28).

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink (I Cor. 12:12-14).

Water baptism in the name of Christ can be very meaningful; but, it is only symbolic of a far greater spiritual reality.¹⁸ For it is

only the one Spirit of God in which we are “all baptized” - at the moment we believe in Christ - that truly cleanses us and unites us together in the one body of Christ. This spiritual baptism into Christ is far greater than any kind of water baptism which we may undergo. For it is a baptism in the life-giving power of God's own Spirit which God himself, through Christ, pours out upon all who believe (Titus 3:4-7; cf. John 1:32-34; Acts 1:5; 2:33; 11:15-17; 15:7-9).

As a result of this God-given “unity of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:3) there are no longer any distinctions among the people of God on the basis of ethnic race, social and economic status or national citizenship. It makes absolutely no difference to God whether a believer in Christ is black or white, rich or poor, European or American because God is no respecter of persons - only of conditions (Acts 10:34-35).¹⁹ Anyone - absolutely anyone - who believes in Christ is accepted by God into his family on an equal basis with everyone else because we are "all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

The Mystery Of Christ

This truth concerning the equal composition of the church of the body of Christ - the new covenant people of God - was so revolutionary that it was not immediately understood by the people of New Testament times. In fact, it was not even revealed by God until many years after the original outpouring of the holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Instead, it was a "mystery" or "secret" hidden in God and never before revealed until it was finally made known to the apostle Paul and then to the other New Testament apostles and prophets. Paul's Letters to the Ephesian and Colossian churches set forth explicitly the wonderful truth regarding this mystery:

Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. *This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus* (Eph. 3:2-6, emphasis added).

This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.....for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in all its fullness - the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. *To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory* (Col. 1:23b-27, emphasis added).

As a result of all that Christ has accomplished, *Gentile* believers in Christ now share equally with Jewish believers in all that God has promised to his people. All who believe in Christ - whether Jew or Gentile - are now "heirs together," "members together of one body" and "sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus".²⁰ In addition, Christ, by way of the Spirit, now lives in each and every believer (Rom. 8:9-10). So incredible are these truths that had "the rulers of this age" known about this mystery "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (I Cor. 2:8). In fact, by instigating Christ's crucifixion Satan himself

thought he had accomplished his greatest victory ever over God; but in truth it was exactly the opposite, because Christ's sacrificial death and his victorious resurrection sealed Satan's doom and gained victory forever for the people of God (Col. 2:9-15; Rom. 16:20). Now a new people of God is being formed made up of all who believe in Jesus Christ from every nation, family and ethnic race of the world. In this new people of God "there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all" (Col. 3:11). What a great truth! For when Christ was personally present on earth he could only be in one place at one time. Today, however, he is present, by way of the Spirit, wherever there is a Christian believer. Therefore, as the church of the body of Christ, with Christ in each and every member, we are his representatives wherever we may be in this world.²¹ The Apostle Paul sums up this wonderful truth in God's plan of salvation:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:20).

As God's children, created in Christ Jesus, foreknown and chosen before the creation of the world, it is now our joy, privilege and responsibility to "declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light" (I Pet. 2:9), so as to bring others into the blessings of God's salvation as well.

CHAPTER 5

The Christ-Like Life of the Believer

When a person accepts Jesus Christ as his risen Lord he is born of God's Spirit and spiritually created in Christ Jesus. As a child in God's family and a member of the church of the body of Christ it is the joy, privilege and *responsibility* of this believer to live a Christ-like life of love and service towards others. In doing this, the Christian believer is able to live in intimate fellowship with God as his Father, strengthen his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, and bring the good news of God's salvation to others in the world. The Book of Ephesians explains the proper relationship of God's gift of salvation to the believer's corresponding responsibility of living a life of good works:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph. 2:8-10).

Salvation is the gift of God. No one is, or ever could be, good enough to deserve it. That is precisely why Christ came into the world - to die for the sins of people like you and me. Good

works in the Christian life are the believer's response to God's gracious love, not the other way around. They are the *fruit* of salvation - not the means to attaining it - and are produced through an ongoing relationship of faith as a child in God's family (Gal. 5:5-6). It is important that we always remember this because trying to be good enough for God, as most religions of the world endeavor to do, is a losing battle which is sure to tie up a believer in frustration, doubts and condemnation. Remember, we are accepted by God because of his grace, through faith in Christ, not because of any worthiness on our own part. Good works must spring from this certainty of God's forgiveness, acceptance and love for us as his children - in Christ!

The Mind of Christ

The principle key for the Christian believer in living a Christ-like life of love and service towards others is learning to live with the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5; I John 2:6). This is a deliberate process accomplished by the free-will decision of each and every believer. It involves a moment by moment and day by day decision to think as Christ would think and live as Christ would live. As we do this God works with us and in us, by way of his Spirit, to help us to grow as his children and to help us accomplish his will in our lives (Phil. 2:13; II Cor. 3:17-18). In short, this way of life is a process of growing and maturing as a child in God's family. Though no one will ever master this way of life perfectly before Christ's return, it is still the goal and ideal for which we strive. As we endeavor to live with this mind of Christ, the Book of Ephesians states:

... we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the

Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Eph. 4:14-16).

As each believer lives with the mind of Christ we all grow together as the body of Christ. By speaking and living the truth in love we are able to care for each other as well as to bring the knowledge of Christ to the world so that others may hear, be saved and be brought into the family of God.

The Renewed Mind

Living with the mind of Christ is accomplished by the process of renewing our minds. This means that we consciously decide to change the way we think by replacing thoughts which are contrary to Christ's character with those which are in accordance with it. This renewed mind walk of learning to think and live as Christ did is a matter of becoming in practice what we already spiritually are in Christ. Christ is in us already by way of the Spirit but we must by our own free-will decide to put on the mind of Christ in our day to day lives - to think as he would think, live as he would live and love as he would love. God's Spirit will not take control of us and force us to live this way. Instead, the choice is always ours - to live as obedient children in a manner worthy of God's love or to conform to the ways of the world (I Peter 1:13-16). Look at Romans:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what

God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will (Rom. 12:1-2).

As Christians who have been saved by God's grace and mercy, we now offer ourselves as living sacrifices in thankfulness to God. This we do by living a life that is holy and well pleasing to God. A "holy" life is a life that has different standards from the world. As children in God's family we live by the principles, standards and goals which God has set forth within the Bible rather than by what the world says. We do not learn to love by watching television and saying, "Oh, that must be what true love is!" No, we base our understanding of love and truth on what the Scriptures teach rather than what the world would have us believe. The Bible, as God's Word in written form, must be our only standard for truth in this life - all else will only lead to confusion and error (Matt. 4:4; 22:29; II Tim. 3:16-17).

The Example of Christ

In learning to live a Christ-like life the Christian believer should focus his or her study of the scriptures on two primary sections of the Bible:

1. The life and teaching of Christ as presented in the Gospels - in the light of their Old Testament background.
2. The New Testament Letters to the Christian believers - in the light of the new covenant which Christ has established.

In studying the life of Jesus Christ in the Gospels we should always remember that it is the *principles* of love and truth by which Jesus lived that we are to imitate - not the specific tasks or ministry of Christ. In other words, we do not have to go to Jerusalem just because Jesus went there, nor do we minister primarily to the Jews just because he did, nor do we need to be crucified as he was. Christ had a specific ministry to perform in

the historical situation in which he lived. He was sent by God specifically as a servant to Israel within his earthly ministry and then to die as the ransom sacrifice for the sins of all mankind. It is, therefore, the principles of love and truth which he taught and exhibited that are of eternal relevance. These same principles must be applied by us today in the historical, geographical and cultural contexts of our own lives. Jesus summed up the principles by which he lived in the two Old Testament commandments which he said were the sum and substance of all the ethical teaching of the Old Testament Scriptures. The Gospel of Matthew records this:

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matt. 22:34-40).

Throughout his life and ministry Jesus taught and showed others how to live this life of love. In doing this, he went beyond the common understanding of the Old Testament Law of his day and showed that what God truly wanted were people who would love and worship him "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21-24) - from the heart - going *beyond* the external rules and regulations which governed the affairs of men (Matt. 9:13; Mk. 12:32-34; Luke 6:1-11). No matter how much of a knowledge of the Bible we may gain in our lives it is this law of love as summarized in the simple and succinct statements of Christ to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself that will always be the foundation for right Christian living. These are statements that anyone of sound mind

can understand and then apply to the many, many varied situations which life may present. Learning to think and live this way is learning to think and live like Christ.

The New Testament Letters

As a result of Christ's life, death, resurrection and the giving of holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, it is now possible for God's people to love and worship God as their own personal Father in spirit and in truth (Eph. 2:18-22; Phil. 3:3). With the giving of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost the age of the new covenant began. This new covenant is not based on external ordinances, rituals or a written code of law. Instead, it is based upon the once for all time sacrifice of Christ for the sins of the world and upon the Spirit of God which is given to every believer in Christ (Heb. 9:15; II Cor. 3:6). As a result, the Christian believer is now able to live in the freedom and confidence of a child of God and to serve others with a Christ-like love from the heart. Look at the following verses from the New Testament Letters:

So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ ... but now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code (Rom. 7:4-6).

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire Law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Gal. 5:13-14).

The lifestyle of living in love, or living in the Spirit, is the very essence of the Christ-like life of the Christian believer. This principle is called within the New Testament Letters "the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). This is the rule, or principle, by which

Christians within the age of the new covenant are to live. Instead of being a legal code of rules and regulations this law of Christ is summed up in the all-encompassing concept of loving God and loving one's fellowman. This life of love is based on the life of Christ himself and is flexible enough to be applied to any historical or cultural situation which this life can bring. The law of Christ is "Christ-centered" rather than "rule centered." It tells us to think and live like Christ rather than to focus on rules or laws which govern the affairs of men. The Christ-like life goes *beyond* a written legal code of conduct (Gal. 5:23) so as to fulfill the intent of God's commands in the many varied situations which this life can bring. It focuses on loving and caring for people just as Christ did. The New Testament Letters speak of this lifestyle as living, or walking, in: "love" (Eph. 5:1-2; Rom. 13:8-10; etc.), "the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16-25; Rom. 8:1-13; etc.) or "the light" (Eph. 5:8-9; I John 1:5-9). Each of these phrases emphasizes the same basic truth - a Christ-like life of love and truth. Let's look at some examples from the NT letters:

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:8-10).

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you

want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law (Gal. 5:16-23).

The contrast between the Christ-like life of love and truth and the worldly lifestyle based on the works of the flesh (the sinful nature) is obvious. Christians should have no part in the works of the flesh since we are not to be conformed to the world but instead to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Since, however, we live in the world it is certain that there will always be a battle taking place between the godly lifestyle of living in the Spirit and the world's lifestyle of the works of the flesh. The battlefield for this ongoing spiritual battle (Eph. 6:10-12) is primarily in the believer's mind and it is here that the Christian believer must learn to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (II Cor. 10:5). When we sin, as we all do at times, we come to God as our Father and express our regret and sorrow by confessing our sins to him. Since he is our loving Father we have his assurance that he will always forgive us so that we may continue to walk in intimate fellowship with him. Look at the Letter of I John:

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with

him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (I John 1:5-10).

The Christian life is a life of living as Christ lived. As we live this way it is our joy and privilege to walk in intimate fellowship with God as our Father and with Christ Jesus his Son. As children in God's family we are "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:16-17) and we are able to share fully in all that is our rightful inheritance in Christ. Since we now have God's Spirit as the "firstfruits" of that inheritance we are even now able to walk in fellowship with God day by day and to enjoy the fruits of that family relationship. But the intimacy of that fellowship is directly proportional to our decision to put on the mind of Christ so as to walk in the light as he is light.

Our Christian Responsibilities

When we accepted Jesus as our Lord we became subject to his benevolent rulership as our Lord and Christ (Col. 3:24). As the head of his church, Christ now nourishes, guides and intercedes for his people from the right hand of God in heaven. As servants of our Lord and members of his church, we are responsible to live for him in every aspect of our lives (Col. 3:17,24). This includes family responsibilities, job responsibilities or any other area of our lives. In addition, Christian believers have two special responsibilities which God has assigned specifically to the church.

First, we are responsible to care for and strengthen our fellow brothers and sisters within the body of Christ in whatever way that we can. Look at the Book of Philippians:

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:1-5).

Though Christians are instructed to "do good to all men," they should make a special effort to do good "to those who belong to the family of believers" (Gal. 6:10). These same thoughts are repeated over and over within the New Testament Letters and the basic idea is certainly not difficult to understand. As God's family and members of the church of the body of Christ, we are all uniquely bound together and therefore have a special obligation to care for each other (cp. Rom 12:1-15:7; I Cor. 12-13; Eph. 4:1-6:9; Col. 3:1-17). We are to "carry each other's burden's, and in this way ... fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1-2).

The second responsibility which God has specifically assigned to the church is to share the good news of God's salvation with others throughout the world (e.g. Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:7-8; 28:28-31; Rom. 10:8-17). This responsibility is called the ministry of reconciliation in the Book of II Corinthians (II Cor. 3:6-5:21). God has given the church a special role to play in the accomplishing of his plan of salvation. If others are to hear about God's love and grace it must come through the efforts of those who have themselves received God's wonderful gift of salvation. As the church of God and citizens of God's kingdom we are

ambassadors for Christ within this world. Look at the following verses:

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (II Cor. 5:14-21).

As Christians we have the joy and privilege of "shining like stars in the universe as we hold out the word of life" (Phil. 2:14-16). We are ambassadors for Christ and we represent him in this world. As we share the truths of God's love and salvation with others we are able to help them to believe the gospel message and thus to be reconciled to God. What an incredible truth that God has entrusted this responsibility to us, his people. Though we may not all be wonderful speakers or evangelists we can all aid in the

accomplishment of this ministry of reconciliation. In our daily lives and in our personal contacts with others we are witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ in all that we do. Through our Christ-like lives, our sharing of God's Word with others, or even through helping those with special ministries in this regard, we can all do our part in helping others "to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4). As Jesus stated, "...if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward" (Matt. 10:42). Let us therefore be faithful to this responsibility which God has entrusted to us for there is no greater task or more noble purpose to be accomplished in this life.²²

The Judgment of Believers

After Christ's second coming each Christian believer will "give account of himself before God" (Rom. 14:9-12) and be judged as to his or her faithfulness in carrying out their Christian responsibilities in this life (II Cor. 5:10). Since "in Christ" we have already been judged and found "not guilty" as regards our acceptance with God and future salvation (Rom. 3:22-24; 5:1-2; 8:1-3), this judgment will be in respect to rewards which have been earned through faithful service to our Lord Jesus Christ or else in respect to penalties for wrongdoing (Col. 3:23-25; I Cor. 3:8-15). In short, believers will stand before Christ's judgment seat in their already glorified bodies and in assurance of being "with him forever" since this transformation takes place instantaneously at Christ's return when believers are "caught up" to meet him in the air (I Thess. 4:13-18; I Cor. 15:50-57).

As our Lord, Jesus will himself be the judge on God's behalf and his judgment will be absolutely just (II Tim. 4:1,8). It will be a judgment based not only on outward acts but also on the inward motives of the heart (I Cor. 4:1-5). All who have rendered faithful service for Christ will "receive their own reward according to their

own labor" (I Cor. 3:8). Those whose work will prove to be of poor quality will have their work "burned up" but they themselves "will be saved, though only as one escaping through the flames" (I Cor. 3:10-15). Though the Bible tells us very little about this future judgment of believers, it is evident that how we live our lives in this present life will have direct bearing on the privileges, honors, and responsibilities that will be ours in the kingdom of God of the coming age. Salvation is absolutely by grace, through faith, but the believer in Christ will also be judged in respect to his faithfulness in carrying out his Christian responsibilities. The Book of Colossians puts the entire Christ-like life of the believer in proper perspective for us:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism (Col. 3:1-25).

This is the Christ-like life of the believer. It is a life of loving service to others based on the truth of God's Word. As we live faithfully for God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord we can enjoy the fellowship of that relationship even now while looking expectantly to the "praise, glory and honor" that we will receive "when Jesus Christ is revealed" (I Pet. 1:7). Therefore,

... my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (I Cor. 15:58).

CONCLUSION

Continue in The Faith

Through-out the New Testament believers in Jesus Christ are exhorted to "continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel" (Col. 1:23; cp. Acts 13:43; etc.). Christianity is not a passing fad in a person's life; it is a lifetime commitment that should continue until death or the second coming of Christ. The New Testament Letters often liken the Christian life to a long-distance race, an athletic contest or even a military battle. Shortly before the end of his life the Apostle Paul put his own Christian life in perspective in his second letter to Timothy:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing (II Tim. 4:7-8).

Paul, who endured more for the sake of Christ than most of us can even imagine, set his hope fully on the second coming of Christ and the reward for faithful service that he would receive at that time. His whole life was lived in the light of this great truth.

No sacrifice was too great and no task was too small if it helped in accomplishing God's plan of salvation (I Cor. 9:1-27). In this lifestyle Paul was imitating Christ and he continually exhorted his fellow believers to do the same (I Cor. 10:31-11:1). The Letter to the Colossian Church provides an example of Paul's exhortation to the different churches which he had founded and continued to nurture:

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness (Col. 2:6-7).

This is the great goal and challenge for the Christian believer. To live and grow with God for a lifetime so as to receive a full reward for our lives of faithful service. The Christian life is a life which has abundant blessings now because of the joy, fellowship and hope which we have as God's children. Since, however, we live our lives within the context of a great spiritual battle we need to strengthen each other and to "put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" (Eph. 6:10-12). In order to most effectively do this there are three very practical things which we can all do on a regular basis:

1. Prayer to God our Father, individually and together with other believers (Phil. 4:6; I Tim. 2:1-4; Matt. 6:5-13; etc.).
2. Read and study the Bible, individually and together with other believers (II Tim. 3:14-17; Rom. 15:4; Psalms 1:119; etc.).
3. Fellowship together with other like-minded believers (Acts 2:42-47; Heb. 10:25; II Tim. 2:22; Matt. 18:20; etc.).

Prayer is simply talking to God as your heavenly Father about anything and everything that may be on your heart. The desire to do God's will should always be the foundation upon which prayer is built (Luke 22:41-42; I John 5:14-15). But we should also learn to bring all our needs to God in prayer knowing that he will understand and help us in all of life's situations. In addition, we should offer praise and thanksgivings to him for the wonderful love and grace that he has bestowed upon us as his people. Reading the Psalms and the many different prayers in the Bible is a good way to see how we also can bring our prayers to God.

Reading and studying the Bible helps us keep our minds focused on what is truly important in life. It is a good idea to read the Bible on a regular basis of some kind. Set some time apart in your daily life just for reading or meditating on the scriptures or else simply do it whenever you are able. Generally speaking, the more you read and gain an understanding of the Bible the more deeply you will become rooted and grounded in your walk with God. Always read in the light of the overall central theme of the Bible - God's plan of salvation. This is the plan which God is working out from the beginning to the end. Since we live in the New Testament era after the death and resurrection of Christ, it is the Book of Acts and the New Testament Letters to the Christian churches or believers which should be our primary focus of study. However, these must be read in the light of their Old Testament background and especially in the light of the life and teachings of Christ as presented in the Gospels. Once this is understood, the Letters written to different churches or believers of the New Testament era can be read by believers today almost as if they were written directly to us - with the exception of certain historical, geographical or cultural situations which have no relevance for us today - because to be a Christian believer today is the same as it was to be one then.

It is also important that we seek out other like-minded Christian believers who are also endeavoring to truly live for God. Believers can meet together anywhere as long as they are able to help and strengthen each other in an atmosphere that is "fitting and orderly" (I Cor. 14:40). The believers of the New Testament times met in various places but primarily in their homes because of the situations in which they lived (e.g. Rom. 16:3-5). The word "church" in the Bible never meant a building. It referred either to the spiritual church of the body of Christ which transcends national, social and geographic lines or to local groups of believers who met together in their particular geographic locations. The primary purpose of believers meeting together is to help and strengthen each other in their walk with God as well as to be able to worship God together. This can be a time when believers read and study the Bible together, pray together, sing songs together, etc. In short, anything that can help us to spiritually edify each other and glorify God together as his family is appropriate.

As God's family, chosen before the creation of the world to enjoy the blessings of his love and goodness forever, we have so much to be thankful for. Let us therefore, as Paul, fight the good fight of faith so that we also may receive the reward for "those who long for his appearing." The Letter of I Peter expresses my thoughts in closing:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls (I Pet. 1:3-9).

God's plan of salvation is fulfilled in us, his people. We are the object of his love and the reason for his plan of salvation. Let us therefore walk worthy of his calling and share the good news of this salvation with all who desire to hear. For:

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" - but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit (I Cor. 2:9-10).

1. "The expression 'eternal life' (Gk. *zoe aionios*) ... is to be understood primarily as life which belongs to God. From the Book of Daniel onwards 'eternal life' is an expression of the longed-for eschatological blessings of salvation, life in the age to come (cf. Dan. 12:2). This is a life that is awaited in the future along with the resurrection of the dead, just as the term can be used ... alternately with ... the kingdom of God ... to denote salvation" (*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 832, The Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1986).

2. The fact that Abraham looked for a "heavenly country" (Heb. 11:16) does not mean that Abraham expected to go to heaven. Instead, he looked forward to the day when God's "heavenly country" would be established in a renewed earth. In biblical thought the future inheritance of God's people is "stored up ... in heaven" (Col. 1:5) until the time when God will intervene in history to "restore everything" through his promised Messiah (Acts 3:21). Though the NT believer's "citizenship" is even now "in heaven," the believer himself is still on earth and will receive the benefits in full only when Christ comes *from* heaven to bring this about (Phil. 3:20-21). Similarly, in I Peter 1:4-7 the NT believer even now has an "inheritance ... kept in heaven" (v. 4) but will not receive it until it "is revealed in the last time" (v. 7). Compare Paul's talking about the "Jerusalem that is above" (Gal. 4:26; cf. Heb. 12:22) and "the New Jerusalem" coming down *from* heaven at the time of the establishment of the new heaven and earth (Rev. 21:1-4). The same is true of "paradise" (cp. Luke 23:42-43; II Cor. 12:1-4; Rev. 2:7; chs. 21-22). The biblical hope is for God's kingdom to *come* - so that God's will may be fully realized "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). The British NT scholar G.R. Beasley-Murray sums up the biblical perspective well: "While the majority of Christendom has been in the habit of thinking of 'heaven' as the place for which the children of God are destined, Jesus makes the startling statement that the meek are to possess [inherit] the earth. This accords with the prophetic and apocalyptic traditions almost in their entirety.....*The kingdom of God comes from heaven to earth, and earth will be fitted to be the scene of such rule*" (*Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, p.163, Eerdmans).

3. Each of these titles foreshadows in exalted and royal terms the coming human Messiah. Isaiah 9:2-7 together with Isaiah 11:1-9 "describe ... the enthronement of the king of salvation and the equipment of the new shoot of David's line with the gifts of the Spirit of God. At his exaltation to sonship, his father confers upon him names that promise salvation ... The king is none other than *God's representative on earth*. With his coming, man's history of woe is at an end; he will bring salvation to the whole world" (*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 637, emphasis mine). The name "Wonderful Counselor" is a term that "points to the Messiah as king ... the coming son of David will carry out a royal program that will cause all the world to marvel" (*The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1030, Zondervan Publishing House). The term "mighty God" is a kingly designation and is defined by the leading Hebrew Lexicon as a "mighty hero" or "divine hero, reflecting the divine majesty" (*Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* by Brown, Driver and Briggs, p.42, Oxford University Press). This mighty hero is "a warrior and defender of his people, *like God himself*" (*The Catholic Study Bible*, p. 888). The title "Everlasting Father" means one who is "ever devoted to his people" (*The Catholic Study Bible*, p. 888). According to some Septuagint texts (i.e.,

a 2nd or 3rd century B.C. Greek translation of the Old Testament) this title should be rendered "father of the age to come" (*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1. p.326). The title "Prince of Peace" means that his reign will be characterized by peace and that "his rule will bring wholeness and well-being to individuals and to society" (*The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1030).

4. The phrase "one like a son of man" refers to "a human, not bestial figure" (*The Defense of the Gospel in the New Testament* by F.F. Bruce, p.6). This is in contrast to the beastly representations of the four Gentile empires in the Book of Daniel which are finally replaced by God's kingdom. The "one like a son of man" is the representative ruler of "the saints, the people of the Most High," to whom the kingdom will be given "forever and ever" (Dan. 7). Jesus identified himself as "the son of man" and specifically stated that he would be seen "coming on the clouds of heaven" at the time of his second coming so as to establish God's kingdom on earth forever (Mark 14:62, etc.).

5. The term "kingdom of God" literally means "the reign, or rule, of God". It refers either to God's active *rule* (i.e., God's kingly reign - manifested through his power, love, righteousness, etc.) or to the future *realm* of paradise where God's *rule* will be perfectly manifested. God's rule has always been in the realm of heaven "over all" (Psalm 103:19). The biblical hope, however, is that God's perfect rule will one day be fully manifested "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt: 6:9-10) - in the realm of "a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (II Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:ff). This will only take place after Christ's second coming. It is this final, imperishable and everlasting kingdom of God that is the ultimate hope of all the biblical writers (e.g. Luke 20:34-36; I Cor. 15:20-28; 50-55; Eph. 1:10; II Pet. 3:13; Rev. 2:7; chs. 21-22; etc.). Other synonymous terms for "the kingdom of God" in the Bible include: "the kingdom of heaven" (e.g. Matt. 5:3, 10, etc.); "the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph. 5:5); "the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" (Rev. 11:15); etc. All of these terms simply emphasize one or another aspect of the same "kingdom of God." For further information on the kingdom of God see the article "Eschatology" in the *New Bible Dictionary* and, especially, the works of G.E. Ladd such as *The Gospel of the Kingdom*; *The Presence of the Future* and *A Theology of the New Testament* (Eerdmans).

6. The words "Messiah" and "Christ" both literally mean "the anointed one." This was understood to mean "God's anointed Savior and King." Old Testament kings were anointed with oil but the prophesied coming Messiah was to be anointed with the Spirit of God (Isaiah 61:1-2). The word Messiah is a transliteration from the Hebrew word "masiah" while the word Christ is a translation from the Greek word "Christos" which is the Greek translation of "masiah." The terms may be used interchangeably.

7. Satan and other spiritual powers are described in the Bible as: "sons of God," "rulers," "princes," "authorities," "powers," "angels," etc. (cf. Job 1-2; Dan. 10:13, 20-21; John 12:31; Eph. 2:1-3; 6:12; etc.). They were created and given responsibilities by God in the spiritual realm (Col. 1:16). Part of these responsibilities concerned various levels of rulership over the nations of the world in the spiritual realm - thus the terms "princes," "rulers," etc. (e.g. Dan. 10; Eph. 6:12). This rulership over the nations is probably

referred to in Deut. 32:8 (see NIV footnote "sons of God" and compare other versions). It is evident that these spiritual powers were given freedom of will, as is the case with humans, and that Satan and forces under his control chose to do evil (John 8:44; I John 3:8). Thus, those aligned with Satan became the "rulers of the darkness of this world" (literally, "world-rulers of darkness") and the "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12). According to F.F. Bruce: "The heavenly realm may be envisaged as comprising a succession of levels, with the throne of God on the highest of these and the hostile forces occupying the lowest. The level which they occupy is probably identical with 'the domain of the air,' ruled (according to Eph. 2:2) by 'the spirit which now operates in the disobedient'" (*The New Int. Com. on the NT, "the Epistle to the... Ephesians,"* p. 406). These powers are the spiritual cause of the evil in the world today (Rev. 12:9; Eph. 2:2, 6:12). However, man has the freedom of will to resist them and do God's will (Eph. 6:10-11; I Peter 5:8-11; James 4:7). Though they have power, it is a limited power which is strictly defined and ultimately subject to God's overall rule and the working out of his plan of salvation (cp. Job 1-2; Rom. 16:20; I Cor. 15:24-28). It should be emphasized that man's understanding of Satan and all spiritual matters must be based on what the scriptures specifically teach and not on speculations or traditions of men.

8. Jesus was fully human (John 1:14; Heb. 3:14; I John 4:2) and therefore a man (I Tim. 2:5-6; Acts 2:22-23; 17:31; etc.). However, he was no ordinary man - he was the Son of God by virtue of his divine conception (Luke 1:26-38). In addition, he was filled "without limit" with the power of God's Spirit at the beginning of his ministry (John 3:34; Luke 3:21-23). As a result, Jesus was able to carry out his mission as the Christ of God in accordance with God's will and to fully make known the heart of his Father, God, to mankind (Luke 4:14-21; Acts 10:38; John 1:18). This is why Jesus could say "anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9) and that Paul could state that Christ is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). For the invisible God whom "no one has seen or can see" (I Tim. 6:16) was manifested to the world through the person of Jesus Christ - the one in whom "dwells all the fullness of the deity in bodily form" (Col. 2:9). It was precisely the fact that Jesus was a man who was "tempted in every way, just as we are ... yet was without sin" (Heb. 4:15) that made it possible for him to redeem mankind back to God. Note the contrasts in the NT between Adam and Christ (Rom. 5:12-21; I Cor. 15:20-21, 42-49).

9. The words "covenant" and "testament" are equivalent terms when used in reference to the old and new covenants. Today the word covenant better expresses the biblical concept. A covenant was an agreement (similar to a contract or treaty) between a greater party (such as a king) and a lesser party (such as the king's subjects). There are several covenants mentioned in the Old Testament but the term "old covenant" refers to the covenant which God set up with Israel as recorded in Exodus 20-24. The terms of the agreement were set out in the Mosaic Law as recorded in the Books of Exodus through Deuteronomy. Since Israel as a whole was unfaithful to this covenant agreement God promised that he would one day establish a "new covenant" between himself and Israel (Jer. 31:31-34). The chief features of this new covenant were that all of God's people would know him as a personal God; that he would write his law on the hearts of his

people; and that he would remember their sins no more. Jesus established this new covenant by his death, resurrection and giving of the Spirit on Pentecost. He also instituted the Lord's Supper by which its significance could be symbolically remembered (cp. Luke 22:14-20 and I Cor. 11:23-33). The new covenant which was originally promised to Israel became the rightful inheritance of the true "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16; Phil. 3:1-3), the church of the body of Christ, as a result of Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection. The new covenant came into force on the day of Pentecost with the giving of the Spirit (Acts 2; II Cor. 3:6) and as with all the blessings of salvation will be manifested in all its fullness after Christ's second coming. See Bible Dictionaries for a more detailed study of the covenant concept.

10. The resurrection of the dead was foretold in the Old Testament to take place at the end of time (e.g. Dan. 12). Christ, as the firstborn from the dead, is the beginning of the resurrection. Therefore, from the Biblical perspective, the end has already begun. The Spirit was also prophesied to be poured out in the last days. According to Peter, this was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17). Therefore, the last days have also begun. It should be remembered that God's perspective on time is quite different than man's (II Pet. 3:1-9).

11. Today Christ reigns as "Lord" at the right hand of God in the highest realm of heaven after having passed "through the heavens" (Heb. 4:14 and see note 7). He is, therefore, "far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come" (Eph. 1:20-21). The fact that God has raised Jesus to life and seated him at his own right hand as Lord over his creation brings glory to God himself when it is acknowledged by our confession (Phil. 2:8-11). Believers in Christ share in this victory because even while on earth we are "seated in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6).

12. The biblical truth of salvation by grace does not give a Christian believer a license to willfully practice sin (cp. Rom. 6:1-23; Jude 3-4). Biblical faith in Christ is not just mental assent; instead, it is an acceptance of, and commitment to, Jesus as Lord (Rom. 10:9). Salvation by grace is "unto good works" (Eph. 2:10) and should issue in an "obedience that comes from faith" (Rom. 1:5) or a "faith which expresses itself through love" (Gal. 5:5-6). God's people are called to holiness and the deliberate practice of sin by God's people cannot be allowed. Though we all sin and it is self-deception to think otherwise (I John 1:8), to *deliberately practice sin* in clear defiance of biblical teaching for godly living will result in divine punishment for the offender, either in this life or at Christ's return (I Thess. 4:3-8; I Cor. 11:27-34; Col. 3:25; etc.). Other Christians are expressly commanded to not associate with those who profess Christ yet live ungodly lives (I Cor. 5:1-13; II Thess. 3:14-15; Eph. 5:3ff.). However, love, mercy and forgiveness should be the norm of a Christian fellowship (Eph. 4:32; I Pet. 4:8) and those who willfully sin should be reprov'd with a view to their restoration to the fellowship of believers (Gal. 6:1).

13. Those who accept Jesus as Lord enter into a living family relationship with God and his Son through the regenerating power of God's holy Spirit (Titus 3:4-7; John 1:12-13,

3:3-8; Gal. 4:4-7). This Spirit is God's own life-giving power and presence that now "lives" or "dwells" in his people (Acts 2:17; I Cor. 2:10-12; Eph. 2:18-22; I Cor. 6:19-20). God's gift of holy Spirit can also be "manifested" in the lives of God's people in various ways "for the common good" as listed in I Cor. 12:1-11 and as illustrated in the Book of Acts and in I Cor. 12-14. It is the cultivation of the "fruit of the Spirit" that is the goal of daily Christian living (Gal. 5:22-23; Rom. 7:6). For more information on this subject see the article "Spirit, Holy Spirit" by J.D.G. Dunn in *New Bible Dictionary*.

14. It must be emphasized that "the NT hope for the Christian dead is concentrated on their participation in the resurrection (I Thess. 4:13-18), and there is therefore little evidence of belief about the 'intermediate state'" (*New Bible Dictionary*, p. 346, Tyndale Pub.). Though there are a few Bible verses that may seem to imply that a believer is consciously with Christ immediately after death (e.g. Phil 1:23), these verses are controversial as to their proper interpretation among Bible scholars and cannot be used to paint a picture of something that occurs beyond what the Bible *specifically says about all believers*. The normal biblical picture of death is that a person is metaphorically asleep, without consciousness, until he is awakened at the time of the resurrection of the dead (Psalm 13:3; 146:4; 6:5; Ecc. 9:4-6, 10; Dan. 12:2, 13). In the New Testament, Christian believers who have died are said to be "asleep in Christ" (I Cor. 15:6, 18, 20, 51; I Thess. 4:13, 14, 15; 5:10). Christ, however, is specifically said to be "the firstborn from the dead" (Col. 1:18) or "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (I Cor. 15:20). All other believers who have died "will be made alive" only "when he comes" (I Cor. 15:22-23). The biblical accounts of the death of Jesus (Luke 23:46; John 19:30) and the death of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60) describe exactly what happens to a believer at the moment of death. The believer "falls asleep" in death and his "spirit" (i.e., his "life-force" or "life-principle") is committed to God for safe-keeping until the time of the future resurrection of the dead at Christ's return. Biblically, this does *not* imply a conscious existence of the individual person after death for the Bible views man as *a necessary unity of body and spirit* rather than as separable parts that can survive and exist on their own (cp. Gen. 2:7; James 2:26). The Platonic Greek idea of the "immortality of the soul" is not found in the Bible and is totally contrary to its teachings. The Hebrew and Greek words often translated "soul" in English Bibles refer to "physical or natural life" and often denote the entire person himself as in the English words "life," "being" or "self." At times they also refer specifically to the "inner life" of the person including his thoughts, emotions and desires. The NT specifically teaches that man is "mortal" (Rom. 1:23) and that death is an "enemy" (I Cor. 15:26); however, death is not something to be feared by believers. For nothing - not even death - can separate believers from "the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:37-39). Since Christ has conquered death (Heb. 2:14-15), believers who "sleep in Christ" will be resurrected and transformed at his return so as to be with him forever in the glorious kingdom of God (I Thess. 4:13-18; I Cor. 15:50-57). (Luke 20:34-38; II Thess. 1:1-10). However, the ungodly "will not inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5). Instead, they will be condemned at the final judgment and their final end will be to "perish" in the lake of fire, i.e., *not* eternal torment, but a final "destruction of the age to come" (II Thess. 1:9; Gal. 6:8; Phil. 3:19). For more information see the articles "Life" and "Eschatology" in *New Bible*

Dictionary and the articles "Soul" and "Punishment" in *The New Int. Dict. of NT Theology*.

15. This booklet does not attempt to deal with aspects of end-time chronology either before or after Christ's second coming. Instead it focuses on the second coming of Christ as *the* moment when all believers in Christ are changed from mortal to immortal, become like Christ and inherit the kingdom of God (I Thess. 4:13-18; I Cor. 15:50-58; I John 3:1-3). This is the clear and simple focus of the Christian hope that all believers should unite on no matter what their views on end-time chronology might be. It should be emphasized, however, that the Bible specifically states that no one knows the time of Christ's second coming except God himself (Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:7; I Thess. 5:1-3; etc.). For further information on this subject see the excellent article "Eschatology" by R.J. Bauckham in *New Bible Dictionary*.

16. The "saints," i.e., God's redeemed and holy people, will at Christ's return, inherit God's kingdom and reign forever over a renewed and glorious earth (Dan. 7:1-27; Matt. 6:9-10; Heb. 12:28; 13:14; Rev. 21:1-22:5, etc.). In fact, the saints will, with Christ, "judge the world" and "judge angels" (I Cor. 6:1-3). Even in this present life the saints are already, by way of the Spirit, citizens and heirs of God's heavenly kingdom to come with their names written on the heavenly register of God's book of life (Eph. 2:18-19; Phil. 3:20-21; 4:3; Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22-24; Rev. 3:5,12). However, the Bible says nothing at all about "saints" as a special class of God's people who are even now *in* heaven where they can receive veneration from, and render aid to, God's people. This idea stems from extra-biblical pagan traditions. Biblically, *all* of God's faithful people are "saints" (Eph. 1:1; 2:19, etc.).

17. Generally speaking, believers in Christ should be the best of all citizens (Rom. 13:1-7; I Pet. 2:13-17), and the best of all family members (I Pet. 3:1-7; Eph. 6:1-4; I Tim. 5:4-8; etc.). However, when the darkness of unbelief overwhelms the light of God's truth the citizens of God's kingdom must hold to God and the truth of his Word as their first allegiance (e.g. Acts 4:18; 5:29, 40-42; cf. the examples of Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the O.T. Book of Daniel).

18. Baptism with water was a symbolic initiation rite in the time of the first century. It was practiced in various forms by pagan religious groups, Jewish religious groups and then by the early Christian believers. For the early Christian believers water baptism was very meaningful and significant. It was an outward expression of faith for new *converts* to Christ - symbolic of the washing away of their sins and expressive of their acceptance of Jesus as Lord (e.g. Acts 2:36-41). Over time, however, baptism came to take on significance far beyond what the New Testament scriptures indicate that it should hold - even to the point of being attributed magical powers so that it could automatically produce (effect) salvation for the person being baptized. Today there is wide disagreement as to the proper meaning and practice of baptism within the Christian community. However, for water baptism to correspond most closely to its NT practice it must be seen as a symbolic act which, in and of itself, has no saving power. Salvation is clearly by grace, through faith, and not of works (Eph. 2:8-10; Rom. 4:1-5; 11:6). God is

more than able to work either in, or apart from, ritual because God looks on a person's heart and gives his Spirit *in direct response to faith* (Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 15:6-11; Gal. 3:14). For more information see the article "Baptism" by J.D.G. Dunn in *New Bible Dictionary*.

19. God loves everyone (John 3:16) and "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good" (Matt. 6:45). However, the blessings of God's salvation are for those who meet the condition which he has set for receiving it: faith in Christ (John 3:16). God's continuing love, goodness and withholding of deserved judgment upon the ungodly should not be misunderstood and, thus, treated with contempt because God's forbearance is specifically intended to lead the ungodly to repentance (Rom 2:4; Acts 14:14-17). It should not be thought, however, that this forbearance will continue indefinitely (II Pet. 3:1-13).

20. This is a fulfillment of the Old Testament Abrahamic covenant promise that "in you [Abraham] all nations of the earth will be blessed" (See Gal. 3:6-4:7). However, it was in a way far greater than ever before revealed. For though it was foretold that the Gentiles would one day be blessed by God, no one even considered that they would be blessed on an *equal* basis with believing Israelites and thus become equal partners with them in God's new covenant people through faith in Christ. This was a mystery kept secret in God.

21. The unfolding of this mystery in the forming of God's new covenant people out from among every nation, family and race on an equal basis with each other is the central focus of God's plan of salvation. It is precisely this new covenant people of God, the church of the body of Christ, which brings glory to God and displays before the spiritual principalities and powers in the heavenly realms God's "manifold wisdom" (Eph. 3:10-11, cp. Eph. 6:12).

22. According to the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, Christ's second coming will not occur until the good news of God's kingdom has been fully made known throughout the world (Matt. 24:14; Mark 13:10; cp. Rom. 11:25). Apparently, this will bring about a time of great tribulation which is climaxed by the appearing of "the man of lawlessness" who will oppose the true God and even go so far as to proclaim himself as God (II Thess. 2:1-5). New Testament believers were very much aware that their Christian responsibilities might bring upon them persecution and hardship in this present life. As Paul stated, "We must go through many hardships [Gr. "tribulations"] to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22; cp. II Thess. 1-2; II Tim. 3:12). It should be noted that persecution can take many forms, usually dependent on the society and political or legal system in which a person lives. It can range from words (Matt. 5:11-12), to imprisonment (Acts chs. 4-7), to even death (Acts 12, etc.). But God's word is extremely clear that faithful service in this life will bring far greater rewards in the life to come (e.g. Matt. 19:28-30; II Tim. 4:7-8).

*For information or help in obtaining books, articles, etc. mentioned in the endnotes above write to the address listed on the back of this booklet.