
The Unity of the Spirit

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"In the Bond of Peace"

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Dear Fellow-believers,

Bible study is a subject of intense interest for most Christians and any believer who has spent much time reading and studying the Scriptures can testify to their life-changing truth. In the Bible the character, will and purposes of the living God are revealed to mankind climaxing in God's plan of salvation which he brings to fulfillment in Christ Jesus, his Son. This central theme of the Bible is emphasized in Paul's letter to Timothy:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (II Tim. 3:14-17).

God's will is for "all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4). It is the Scriptures that point the way. First, the Scriptures are intended to bring people to "salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." Second, the Scriptures provide "training in righteousness" for the saved people of God. In short, God's plan of salvation - both its doctrinal and practical aspects - is the main theme of the Bible around which everything else revolves. In this light, we offer some very simple principles to focus on in Bible study:

(1) Focus on the central theme of the Bible: God's plan of salvation which he brings to fulfillment through his Son, Jesus Christ.

The main character of the Bible is God and the main story line of the Bible is God's plan of salvation which he brings to fulfillment through his Son, Jesus Christ. It follows that God's plan of salvation should be the central focus of all Bible study. All other biblical topics should be subjected to, and understood in the light of, this overall theme. The Bible is not a twentieth century "how to succeed" book filled with "principles for success" based on worldly standards. Nor is it a book of esoteric mysteries designed to tickle our itching ears. Instead, it is a book about a living God and the accomplishment of his purposes for his people and creation - all to the praise of his glory. It should be read, studied and understood in this light.

The Bible points to and focuses on the climactic "mid-point" of God's plan of salvation - the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the salvation accomplished through these events. This salvation, which the Old Testament foreshadows and foretells, is announced, recorded and explained in the pages of the New Testament. Each NT "Gospel" comes to a climactic crescendo in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ because it is in these events that salvation has been "won" for the people of God. The Book of Acts and the NT Letters then set forth an explanation of the significance of these salvific events as embodied in the "gospel" message. In short, through his sacrificial death Christ has paid the ransom price for the sins of all mankind forever and through his victorious resurrection God has made him Lord over God's people and creation.

This event marks the beginning of a new age in God's plan of salvation for mankind. Paul sets forth a summary of this "gospel" or "good news" in I Corinthians:

Now brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you have received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you, otherwise you have believed in vain.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures ... this is what we preach, and this is what you believed (I Cor. 15:1-11; cf. Rom. 10:9-10).

It is this "gospel" of salvation concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that is "of first importance" in the Scriptures and it should be our initial and abiding point of focus in Bible study. By focusing on this victorious mid-point of God's plan of salvation we can see the whole biblical picture in proper perspective. We can look backwards to the time of God's preparation and promises in the Old Testament and then forward to the giving of God's Spirit on Pentecost as well as to the final consummation of God's kingdom at Christ's return.

All of the NT Letters present salvation from an "already" but "not yet" perspective of fulfillment and should be understood in this light. Believers have "already" received the firstfruits of the Spirit and are therefore "saved." But we have "not yet" received the fulness of the "salvation" that is to be revealed at Christ's return; therefore, we still have "the hope of eternal life." This is set forth clearly in Titus:

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).

(2) Read and study the Bible in the light of the original intent of each inspired writer and in

accordance with each book's historical, cultural and linguistic background.

The Bible should be read intelligently and understood in the light of the original intent of each inspired writer. The belief that "all Scripture is inspired by God" does not mean foregoing reason or doing away with historical, cultural and linguistic study. In order to get the most out of Bible study certain facts are simply essential to know. First, the Bible is a collection of written documents of various kinds. They were collected over many centuries and finally put in the form in which we have them today. These "books" are arranged logically. For example, in the New Testament: the Gospels, then Acts and then the NT Letters.

Originally, however, each New Testament Gospel, Letter, etc. was written independently to a specific group of people to address specific situations and needs. Each of these NT documents focused on some aspect of the "gospel" of Jesus Christ. But the inspired writers of these documents did not write them with the idea of their being put into a NT "canon" of Scripture - this occurred much later with the final form of our present canon being completed only in the 4th century. Originally each NT document was a self-contained "Gospel," "Letter," etc. and should be read as such. Since they each focus on some aspect of the "gospel" they all fit together "thematically." However, to try to make them fit together in every detail like a giant jigsaw puzzle is to go beyond their original purpose.

Let us remember, it is the "gospel" - the good news of Christ's death and resurrection - that is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). This "good news" is not a complicated message. Even a person who cannot read can understand it and live in the light of it. It is so simple, in fact, that its primary truths were all symbolized in what became the central focus of the gatherings of the early Christian churches - the Lord's Supper. The key to Bible study is to begin with and focus on this "gospel" of salvation. Then, branch out from there to gain a wider scope and understanding of the Bible as a whole.

Richie Temple

Salvation by Grace: the Gift of God

by Richie Temple

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The biblical truth of salvation by grace is a fundamental concept which should be understood by every Christian believer. 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 now 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).

The "how" of receiving salvation is to confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and to believe 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 believe that "God raised Jesus from the dead" is to accept this testimony of God's word as being true and then to hold to it within your life. To confess that "Jesus is Lord" is to acknowledge, or state

outwardly, what you believe to be true inwardly. This belief and confession are based upon the freewill decision of any individual 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" or "coronated" 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. 15:24-25).

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 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, 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 by our own good works 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. Those who choose to accept him receive the benefits of this - the gift of eternal life. Look at the Book of 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.

The Books of Romans and Ephesians emphasize the truth that this 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; that is, undeserved divine favor from God to man. This absolutely rules out any possibility for man by his own merit or good 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; cp. Rom. 4:1-5).

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.

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 at that moment born of God's Spirit (John 1:12-13; 3:1-8; I John 5:1) and becomes a child in God's family (Rom 8:16; Gal. 4:4-7), a spiritual citizen of God's kingdom (Eph. 2:18-19, Phil. 3:20) and a member of the church of the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:12-13, 27). In addition, the believer is spiritually 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 Spirit is a "downpayment" or "deposit, guaranteeing our inheritance" in the future kingdom of God (Eph. 1:13-14; II Cor. 1:21-22, 5:5). Therefore, the believer in Christ is able to enjoy already, in part, the blessings of 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 our "lowly bodies" will be transformed to become like his "glorious body." 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 spiritual 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. 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 in Christ "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).

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 who 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).

[This article is adapted from chapter three of the forthcoming 3rd edition of this writer's booklet "God's Plan of Salvation" and can be ordered free of charge from this newsletter]

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Righteousness Based on the Law: Is it Possible?

Paul, of all people, is not against "good works" and would have been the first to insist that true faith issues in the "fruit" of good works. The term "works of the law" (e.g. Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16; etc.) means "works prescribed by the law." What Paul opposes is the idea that righteousness - a right standing with God - can be earned on the basis of keeping the Mosaic law (e.g. Acts 15:1-5; Rom. 4:1-6; 9:30-32; Gal. 2:21; 3:10; etc.). It cannot, nor by extension can it be earned through good works or religious ritual of any kind, for one simple reason - "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Therefore, "no one will be declared righteous in his

sight through the works of the law" (Rom. 3:19-20). Though the OT law provided for sacrifices to deal with sin, these in reality "could never take away sins" for "it is impossible for the blood of bulls or goats to take away sins." Only Christ could do that through his "once for all time" sacrifice for the sins of mankind (Heb. 10:1-14).

The Bible does at times speak of men being "righteous" by observing the Mosaic law or simply by living in general obedience to God. This righteousness, however, is meant to be understood in a *relative* sense. But when mankind is examined in an *absolute* sense against the background of the reality that we are "all under sin" the conclusion is clear: "there is no one righteous, not even one" for "the whole world is a prisoner of sin." Christ's mission was not "to save the righteous, but the unrighteous" - a category in which all men find themselves if they are honest. It was to offer a solution to this problem that Christ "came into the world to save sinners." This solution is set forth by Peter:

Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God (I Pet. 3:18).

Therefore, Paul concludes:

I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing! (Gal. 2:21).

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Complete In Christ

by Chuck LaMattina

Chicago, Illinois

A few years back, a New York rabbi named Harold Kushner, wrote a book called, *When Bad Things Happen To Good People*. His book was on the New York Times best seller list for almost a year. As its title suggests, Kushner tried to deal with, and come up with, an explanation for all the tragedies we see in life. People have always tried to come to grips with this issue. The basic question is, "How can God allow bad things to happen to seemingly innocent people?"

Rabbi Kushner deals with the issue of life's tragedies by arguing that bad things happen, because in reality God is not totally Sovereign. He is not all-knowing, nor all-powerful. The rabbi believes that in the end God will ultimately triumph, but that at times, here and there, things do get out of God's control. He advises his readers that the best they can do in light of this, is to forgive God, and then do what God does - just get on with life.

The rabbi believes that it is better for us if we come to terms with the fact that God is not all-knowing, or all-powerful; rather than thinking that God is not all loving or good. That is the way he would have us deal with the question of why bad things happen to good people. Not only do I think his answer leaves much to be desired, but I think he and the rest of us are asking the wrong question. The question to ask is not, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" But, "Why do good things happen to bad people?"

In the gospel of Luke there is an unparalleled account, where some people ask Jesus Christ about the reasons behind two tragedies. In the one, a group of Galilean worshipers were killed by Pilate and his Roman soldiers, while they were sacrificing in the temple. The soldiers cruelly mixed the Galileans' blood in with the sacrifices. In the other tragedy, a tower of some kind accidentally fell and killed 18 people. The people who questioned Jesus Christ supposed that the tragedies occurred because the victims were bad sinners. Our Lord's response shows a lack of real understanding of life on the part of those who asked the question.

And Jesus answered them and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:2-5 NKJV).

A harsh response, lacking in compassion? I don't think so. The Bible paints a vastly different picture of mankind than we paint. We tend to think everyone is basically good. The Bible teaches just the opposite. It teaches that from the time of Adam's fall, there is no one truly good, no not one. In Romans, chapter 3 we read, "...There is no one righteous, no not one" (vs. 10).

And thus, the amazing thing is not that bad things happen to good people, but that good things actually happen to bad people! The amazing thing is that in the face of man's rebellion against God we don't see worse tragedies. The amazing thing is that God graciously offers to save and redeem people in Jesus Christ, rather than letting us all die. For as the Scriptures teach, "...the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:21).

The Word of God teaches us that there are basically only two groups of people, those who are in Adam and those who are in Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15 we read,

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

The word "in" is the Greek preposition *en*, and it carries with it the idea of being within the very center of something, of being surrounded within an object, or a sphere of influence. It indicates permanence and continuance, unless a stronger force comes along. As Adam is the founder and head of the human race, all who are descended from Adam are said to be in him. The end result of this union is death. Preceding that death are all the pains and problems and sorrows that afflict every life.

But as we are going to see, Christ Jesus is the founder and the head of a new race of people. And all who are in him, find their lives lived with fullness of blessing. Because of the amazing grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ good things can happen to bad people. The apostle Paul tells us of these good things in his letter to the Ephesians,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence (Ephesians 1:3-8).

Notice the phrase "in Him" repeated over and over again in these verses! To have life in Christ is to have a far more significant and satisfying existence than anything we could ever imagine. To have life in Christ is to have the resources and remedy, to deal with the fundamental concerns of life. It is to be able to live life with great blessing. These verses describe for us our blessing, and status, and glory because we are in Christ.

First, verse 3 tells us that we have in Christ, every spiritual blessing. All who are saved by faith in Christ are given in him every spiritual resource they may ever need to live life abundantly. We are given love, and grace, and peace. We are made righteous, and are given strength, and hope. In Christ we are granted everything we may ever need to enjoy life and to have a vital relationship with God.

Secondly, verse 4 says that in Christ we were chosen from before the foundation of the world, to stand before Him as those who are holy and without blame. We stand before God bathed in His love! We were chosen in Christ to live our lives in a distinctly different manner from everyone else. Being blessed by God in Christ, we were chosen to enjoy the fruit of our new status with God, the fruit of love, and peace and joy. And we can carry this

fruit of our blessing in Christ, into all our relationships, and into every circumstance. The Bible says that we can be,

fruitful in every good work... strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and long suffering with joy (Colossians 1:10-11).

This wonderful section of Ephesians continues by telling us in verse 5, that we were predestined to be adopted as God's sons. Literally, this means that in Christ we have been legally designated as God's heirs. In Christ we have been given a spiritual treasure that is inexhaustible and incorruptible. And there is nothing in life that could ever compare to this inheritance, good or bad. In Romans, chapter 8, we learn that,

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs -heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Romans 8:16-18).

In the fourth place, we have been "accepted in the Beloved [Christ]" (Eph. 1:6). In other words, in Jesus Christ we have free access to God, we stand in the light of His good favor, and have available to us all the resources of our God. The practicality of this truth is that we can have a bold and loving confidence in our God as the following verses make clear.

in whom [Christ] we have boldness and access [to God] with confidence through faith in Him (Eph. 3:12).

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:19-23).

And lastly, Ephesians 1:7 points out that in Christ we have redemption and forgiveness of sins. In redemption we are bought out of the world's slave market, rescued from the power of sin. We are rescued from the world's foolish wisdom that really only leads to slavery rather than liberty. We are redeemed from the corrupting influences of our age. And in redemption we are redeemed, or delivered from the powers of spiritual darkness. As Colossians states,

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:13-14).

Those who are in Christ are delivered from the manipulating influences and captivating powers of every devilish force. The believer in Christ never needs to be under the tyranny of the demonic. Never! And in Christ we are forgiven of our sins, cleansed through and through, spiritually healed and reconciled to God. In Christ we are totally saved.

For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by [in] His life (Romans 5:10).

What a shame that the world around us scours the junk yard of the world's religions and philosophies, collecting trash to deal with life's problems, when the bountiful and practical blessings of God are freely given to us in Jesus Christ!

What really makes a difference in life? How do we deal with the problems we face? Do we deal with life by deciding that, yes, God is good, but incapable of real help? Do we just get on with life thinking that maybe a change in jobs, or cities, or even a husband, or wife will solve our difficulties? Do we look to education for answers, to more governmental intervention? Government and its laws change very little, if at all. Education simply provides us with more facts, or with more questions. Moving to a new location physically, or emotionally only changes the scenery, not the real issues of life!

It is changed people who change everything. And it is only God who changes people by taking them out of Adam and placing them in Christ. If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have

been radically changed. You are a part of a new race, a new creation, with new potential and a new destiny. And we are called to live differently.

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus; that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:14-17).

Once we believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior we are no longer who or what we were before. Even Jesus Christ is not now what he was according to the flesh. He is now glorified, filled with all the fullness of God. And in him, we are in all reality, a new creation, a new species. We can now live with new power, new purpose and with a new hope.

The word for "new" in vs. 17, is the Greek word *kainos*, meaning not new in time, but new in quality. Verse 17 means that we have a new nature, different from the old. It means the believer can live in a new manner, with new power, bringing new results.

In salvation God recreates us and places us in Christ. In doing this, He gives us new life. He makes us new people. We now have divine power for the present, and hope for a new future. As Colossians 1:27 says, it is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Old things, old fears, old hurts, old inabilities, old aspirations, can be gone, and all things can be made new! As a new creation in Christ life takes on a freshness and a freedom that was simply impossible while we were still in Adam. We are given new life and new hope, only by being born again. This is what Jesus told a man named Nicodemus.

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:1-3).

Without the new birth there is no new life, there is no new hope. Newness of life comes from being born again. Now, it would be good to stop and think about this man Nicodemus for a moment. He was a Jew, one of God's chosen people. He belonged to one of the strictest sects of his time. He was a member of the ruling council of Israel, the Sanhedrin. He was a teacher of the law and he earnestly endeavored to live righteously before God.

But he was also a descendant of Adam and thus possessed Adam's fallen nature and destiny. No matter how hard this man tried, he could not achieve on his own, what God could give him in Christ. Nicodemus needed to be radically changed, to be born again. In the Old Testament the prophet Jeremiah said to Israel,

Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil? (Jeremiah 13:23).

No one can change what is a part of their intrinsic nature. As Jesus Christ continued to tell Nicodemus,

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit ... You must be born again (John 3:6-7).

We must be given a new life.

The word "birth" always carries the meaning of new life. And the life always partakes of the nature of the parent. A little puppy has the nature of a dog in him and nothing will change that. A human being has the nature of Adam, and nothing can change that except to be taken out of Adam and given a new birth in Christ. The only way to escape the death and tragic way of life that is found in Adam, is to be created anew in Christ.

And you He [God] made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh and of the mind, and were by

nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:1-10).

How can good things happen to bad people, to people who are dead in trespasses and sins? The answer is the grace of God in Christ Jesus! Those who are saved are now God's "workmanship created in Christ." The word "workmanship" is translated from the Greek word *poema*, a word used for a significant and extremely valuable work of art. The word was used for a masterpiece. We are God's masterpiece! His new creation in Christ!

Being a Christian doesn't mean making a few minor adjustments to life. It doesn't mean trying a little bit harder to be a little bit better. It doesn't mean forgiving God for His missing the call and then moving on! Being a Christian means that you have undergone a radical spiritual transformation in Christ. Now we can and we must make a radical change in our thinking and in our living. The excellency of our whole Christian life depends on understanding our secure position in our Lord.

Romans 3:24 tells us that we were justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Romans 6:11 states that we need to reckon ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ. Romans 6:23 declares that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ. Romans 8:1 simply states that there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ. Romans 8:39 boldly proclaims that nothing past, present, or future shall ever be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. 1 Corinthians 1:30 joyfully announces that God has

placed us in Christ, and that he has become for us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. 2 Corinthians 1:21 tells us that it is God who establishes us, or fixes us in Christ, indicating our security. 2 Corinthians 2:14 proclaims that God always leads us in triumph in Christ. 2 Timothy 1:9 says that God saved us not according to our own works, but according to His own purposes that were given to us in Christ before time began. And Philemon verse 6 says that the sharing of our faith becomes effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing that is in us in Christ! The heart of the gospel is that we are complete in Christ!

As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power (Colossians 2:6-10).

We must not allow ourselves to be robbed out of our fullness in Christ by worldly wisdom. In Christ we are complete. In Christ we move out of death into life, we move from tragedy to victory! Being in Christ is a vital, spiritually organic, intimate union that involves a shared life, a shared love and a shared destiny which no one can ever change.

My Christ He is the Lord of lords, He is the King of Kings.

He is the Sun of Righteousness, With healing in his wings.

My Christ he is the heaven of heaven.

Upon his glorious name I call.

My Lord, my Savior, My first and last.

My Christ is my all in all!

[This article is taken from Chuck's book *Christ Our Life* which is available from Grace Ministry USA, 7359 N. Hoyne, Chicago, IL 60645]

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A Letter From Russia

In her recent newsletter "The St. Petersburg News" Tracy Savage, a missionary in the St. Petersburg, Russia area, had some interesting comments on the topic of salvation and how to share it with others. With Russia in the news so much lately perhaps it would be good to remember what the real "battle" is all about:

"As I continue learning about how to reach people's hearts and minds in Russia, I have become more enlightened to the differences of preaching, teaching and witnessing to a person ignorant of God and the Bible compared to one who grew up with Christianity around him. I have always considered John 3:16 over-used or too simple a verse, too simple a truth. But, in approaching ignorance the bottom line, the sum of the Word of God, salvation is that God loves you and he gave His Son for you. Knowledge doesn't save but believing and accepting the fact of John 3:16 does save. Of course it is beneficial to know all God teaches and has prophesied. This will bring us closer to Him because we will know more of Him and His plan for us. This will strengthen our faith and make us wiser. But this knowledge doesn't save. When the whole Word is considered, understood and read cover to cover, the purpose of God is still forgiveness and salvation through Jesus because he so loves us."

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Books in Review

Paul's Letter to the Romans

by the Apostle Paul

"Paul's Letter to the Romans" is a good place to focus on in one's study of the Bible. This has rightly been the judgment of many generations of Bible students and scholars down through the centuries. Romans has sometimes been called the *Magna Carta* of the New Testament for in it the liberating truths of God's plan of salvation are explained in more detail and in greater continuity than anywhere else in the Bible. To a great degree if one masters Romans one has mastered God's plan of salvation as presented in the Bible as a whole. In Romans God's love, righteousness and grace in

bringing his children, and his entire creation, into the blessings of his salvific plan are made known from beginning to end.

As with any book of the Bible, the fundamental key in gaining an understanding of Romans is simply to read it over and over so as to gain a scope of its message as a whole. Choose one English version as your basic text and use others for comparison purposes. Then as you study, memorize those sections that are most meaningful to your life so that you can dwell on those truths. Focus on the sections that are clear. Many people who set out to read Romans get lost somewhere in 1:18-3:20 or chapters 9-11. I've always found it helpful to often just skip over these sections when I read Romans in order to keep the continuity of thought of the central theme. I suggest the following outline for reading Romans. It focuses on the central theme of "the gospel" which is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16-17):

Rom. 1:1-17 Introduction and theme: the gospel of God.

Rom. 3:21- 8:39 The gospel expounded in detail: victory in Christ.

Rom. 12:1-15:13 The practical Christian life.

If read straight through in this manner the continuity of the central theme of "the gospel" is preserved along with the proper response of mankind to it - the "obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5; 16:26).

The sections that are skipped in the outline above are detailed discourses on specific topics that can be cumbersome and distracting in understanding the central message of Romans. In fact, each of these "digressions", though very important, is among the most hotly debated sections of Scripture in the entire Bible. What *is* certain, however, about these sections is their *conclusions*: 3:19-20 (all are under sin; therefore, no one will be justified by the works of the law) and 11:32 (God's mercy upon all in Christ). When studied - and they should be studied - *these sections should be read and understood in the light of their conclusions*. Only then will they be properly understood in the light of Romans as a whole.

No matter how much you read Romans it is helpful to have other study aids to help in

understanding what is being said. Above all I recommend a good Study Bible(s) and commentaries. Interlinears and other study aids, though helpful, can be misleading if not used properly. Words have to be understood in their contexts not on a one to one basis with a Greek text. For basic word definitions, etc. Study Bibles are the easiest and quickest resource. For more in-depth study commentaries are essential. These explain background, word usage in context and much other helpful information.

There are two commentaries that I especially recommend on Romans: First, on a simpler level the *Tyndale NT Commentaries, Romans* by the late evangelical scholar F.F. Bruce. Bruce's Introduction is exceptional and he gives a warm, lively and uplifting exposition of the gospel throughout. On the detailed scholarly level, the *Anchor Bible* volume by Joseph Fitzmyer is head and shoulders above all the others. The Introduction alone is easily worth the price of the book and the format is clear and easy to follow. But be sure to have a good dictionary close by and prepare to be educated. Fitzmyer has a vast knowledge of every aspect of Romans and his commentary is a model of learning, sound judgment and precise explanations. How ironic that such a *magnum opus* on Romans would come from the pen of a Roman Catholic Jesuit Priest!

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Notes & Quotes on the Bible

Understanding the Bible

Most of us are not Bible scholars nor do we need to be. The "gospel of salvation" (Eph. 1:13) is a simple message and when explained correctly it is easy to understand. All of the NT books revolve around this same theme. However, if we are going to teach the Bible in our fellowships, churches, Bible studies, etc. then we have a responsibility to be as accurate as we can in what we present. To do this it is helpful to not only read the Bible itself but also to consult Bible study aids that are prepared by experts in biblical studies. The last half of the 20th century - especially the last 25 years - has seen a virtual explosion in such study aids and this will be our focus in this article.

First though, a few preliminary comments may be helpful. It is common knowledge that many Bible believing Christians prefer to "just read the Bible" rather than to use Bible study aids. The fact is, however, that we all read the Bible under the guidance and tutelage of others whether we know it or not. To begin with, every version of the English Bible that we use today - i.e., KJV, NIV, etc. - is the result of a painstaking effort by the translators and editors of that version to understand the "original" text and to translate it into equivalent English that communicates its message faithfully. This very process requires knowledge of the original biblical languages, history, culture, etc. and - unbeknownst to many - forces the translator to make *interpretive* choices in the words he or she chooses for the translation. In addition, it is even more obvious that most people who read the Bible also listen to sermons, teachings, etc. - all of which are aids for helping us to understand the Bible. The question is not then, *if* we should use study aids? Rather it is, *which* study aids will we use and/or *which* teachers will we choose to listen to?

In this light, the Book of Acts presents a wonderful record that is very instructive for those of us who are interested in coming to a better and more detailed understanding of the Bible:

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go South to the road - the desert road - that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. So he started out and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

"How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."

The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

Who among us has not felt at times like the Eunuch as we endeavor to read and understand the Scriptures? Who has not at times felt like he needed help? In this light there are three specific points in this record that can serve as basic principles for us in our own reading and study of the Scriptures:

(1). Read, study and memorize the Bible. This is the first thing that should be noticed about the eunuch. He was reading the Scriptures in order to gain an understanding of them. He was searching for truth. This is so very important for no matter what else you do you must read the Scriptures if you want to understand them. Without doing this there is

not much point in trying to proceed any further. For it is impossible to gain a good knowledge of the Bible as a whole without putting forth a great deal of time and effort. Few things in life that are worthwhile come easy and biblical understanding is certainly not one of them. In this light it must be emphasized: *any sincere quest for understanding the Bible must rest on the foundation of one's own reading, study and memorization of the Scriptures.*

(2). We should seek help in understanding the Bible from those who are better trained in the Scriptures. Is there any other field of study where this is not true? The Eunuch in the passage above needed help in understanding the Scriptures from someone who was better trained in the Scriptures than himself. First, he read them for himself. Then he sought help from someone else. The principle responsibility lies upon ourselves for making the necessary effort to study the Bible and then to seek out those resources or teachers that/who can best help us. They don't just automatically or instantaneously appear on our desks, beside our easy chairs, or under the Christmas tree.

(3). The focus of our study should be God's plan of salvation which he brings to fulfillment through his Son, Jesus Christ - both its doctrinal and practical aspects. The focus of what Philip taught "beginning from that very Scripture" was "the good news about Jesus." This is where all biblical study should begin and where its central and abiding focus must be. The purpose of Bible study is not to find things that will tickle our itching ears. It is to enable us to understand and live in the light of God's wonderful plan of salvation. Keeping this focus will help us avoid all kinds of charlatans who would have us believe and follow "some new thing" which they have just discovered in the Bible.

In the light of these three basic common sense principles we will now set forth a listing of recommended aids for Bible study - focusing on the New Testament. All of the works listed are works by Bible scholars of outstanding abilities who are experts in the original languages, history and

cultures of the Bible. These authors are all believers and range from conservative to somewhat liberal in their Scriptural viewpoints. They encompass many different denominations from evangelical Protestant to Roman Catholic. The works chosen are chosen solely on the basis of the quality of the scholarship.

The one common denominator in all of these scholars - in addition to their scholarly abilities - is their "already" but "not yet" viewpoint of the fulfillment of "salvation history" in the New Testament. In other words, all of the scholars below view the NT as presenting the culmination of God's OT promises to his people through the coming of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. With Christ's first coming the power of God's kingdom was manifested on earth; through the giving of the Spirit on Pentecost the firstfruits of God's kingdom has already been received; and finally, the second coming of Christ will usher in the final establishment of God's kingdom in a renewed and glorious earth.

One should choose from these works carefully. Before buying any of them look them over in bookstores or borrow them from libraries to see if they'll be useful for you. As with any book, one should read the preface and introduction of each work listed in order to most effectively use them in the light of their plan and purpose. The following listings are our *top* recommendations but this does not imply that we agree with all that is said in any of them or that there are not many other useful works as well. It is assumed that our readers are able to think for themselves and come to their own conclusions as they use these works. Each study aid will be listed by either author or title or commentary series. Well known titles are abbreviated for the sake of space. All books listed are available from CBD (Christian Book Distributors) unless otherwise noted. Call them - ph. 1-978-977-5000 - for a free catalog and information on membership, etc. through which you can get even more discounts. Out of print books are listed (OP) and must be found in used bookstores or wherever you can find them. They will only be listed if they are of exceptional quality. The recommendations below are based on the quality of the particular work, their availability and the price. Choose wisely according to your own needs.

Recommended New Testament Study Aids:

1. Bible Versions:

The Bible can be understood in any of the major English versions that are used today such as the NIV, NASB, NRSV, KJV, NKJV, NAB, etc., - if they are diligently read! Since all of these versions are fairly accurate, the number one guiding factor in choosing a version should be that it is "reader-friendly" - i.e., it is a version that *you* can and will read!! The KJV is certainly beautiful, reverent, even majestic, but it is also archaic and *by far* the least accurate of any of the versions above. Beyond that, they all have their strong and weak points. Whichever version is chosen as your main text annotations may be necessary for accuracy sake. Several other versions should also be used for comparison purposes. It is also useful to have a Greek-English Interlinear to help you get a sense of the underlying Greek text. I recommend *Marshall's* which comes in several formats with certain major versions in the margin. Read the "Introduction" in each Bible version and interlinear so as to understand and use it properly.

2. The NIV Study Bible:

The NIV Study Bible is the single most useful and complete study aid that I know of for the non-technical student of the Bible. It is full of useful information - background, word definitions, maps, diagrams, commentary, short concordance, scripture cross-references, etc. It is conservative in its outlook towards Scripture but recognizes the necessity for historical, cultural and linguistic study to properly understand the Bible. This is a good place to start when looking for word definitions, background information, etc. There are also other good Study Bibles keyed to other versions which can be used.

3. New Bible Dictionary:

Next to a good Study Bible this is by far the best study aid for the general student of the Bible. It should be the first study aid to turn to when studying any topic. The NBD is conservative in outlook and the articles are written by many outstanding biblical scholars. There are a lot of other good Bible Dictionaries - both single and multi-volume - which you can choose from to supplement this one.

4. Word Meanings: Strong's or NIV Concordance; Vine's; Thayer's; BAGD and NIDNTT:

Study Bibles have concise definitions of most key words and this is all most people need. Beyond this the most useful method of studying individual words is through the five works listed above, all of which are linked by Strong's numbering system. The works above are listed in order of increasing complexity. You should look these over in a bookstore before buying them to see if they'll be useful for you and also to be sure that you get the edition that has the Strong's numbering system in it. They don't all have this. As always, read their Introductions. Vine's and Thayer's are both somewhat out of date and Vine's is also biased by its dispensationalist views; but, they are both still a good starting place in studying a word. The two best works on words linked to Strong's numbering system are the one volume *A Greek-English Lexicon of the NT and Other Early Christian Literature* by Bauer, Arntd, Gingrich and Danker (BAGD) and *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (NIDNTT) - in 3 volumes plus one volume of extremely useful indexes. These are more complex but are very useful, highly regarded by scholars and are widely referred to in other Bible dictionaries, commentaries, and other references. Very basic Greek - at least the alphabet - is helpful or necessary with some of these.

5. A Theology of the New Testament :

It is vital to properly understand the New Testament perspective of "Salvation History" in order to understand NT concepts and words properly. *A Theology of the New Testament* by George Eldon Ladd is an excellent tool for doing this. This work explains the NT perspective of salvation history in clear terms and then goes through the entire NT in a logical manner dealing with almost every important NT word, concept and issue. The indexes in this work are also excellent and make it possible to look up almost any verse, subject, etc. of importance and to study them in-depth. Though this book is a little out of date, it is still the best single work on NT theology for the general student of the Bible. It is considered a classic by most evangelical scholars and offers a good bridge into the world of more detailed New Testament commentaries.

Recommended New Testament Commentaries:

Bible commentaries are indispensable for serious study of the individual books of the Bible. But, they are not for everybody. They should be used as *references* to help with background, word meanings, setting, etc. in order to understand a book or section of scripture *in its original context*. Some are written well enough to be read straight through but they should never take precedence over your own reading, study and memorization of the Scriptures themselves. The commentaries below are listed in order of increasing complexity under each NT book as well as by the author and title of the series in which they appear. The Tyndale, NIBC, Expositors and NCBC series can be understood by any reasonably educated person with a little effort. They're also very inexpensive. The others become increasingly complex and costly. See a CBD catalog for prices. All abbreviations are explained at the end.

Matthew:

1. Richard T. France, Tyndale
2. Donald A. Carson, Expositors

These are both excellent commentaries that complement each other well throughout. I generally prefer France's because it is a clearer format but Carson's is more detailed. It's good to compare their views of the eschatological discourse of Matt. 24. The most detailed commentary on Matthew is the ICC contribution by Allison and Davies which is in three volumes for the exorbitant price of \$160.00!!

Mark:

1. Larry Hurtado, NIBC
2. William Lane, NICNT

Hurtado's commentary is somewhat dry but it is solid in background material with good end-notes after each chapter. Most people wouldn't need more than this together with *The NIV Study Bible*. Lane's commentary has more detail and a real reverence for the subject but I'm not sure many really need a commentary of this size on Mark. Mark is pretty straightforward except for sections like chapter 13.

Luke:

1. E. Earl Ellis, NCBC (OP)
2. Joseph Fitzmyer, Anchor, 2 Volumes

E. Earl Ellis' commentary on Luke is a classic and though the NCBC series is (OP), it is well worth trying to find this particular volume. There is a lot in this commentary that you won't find anywhere else. It is written in a succinct style with an excellent Introduction. Fitzmyer's commentary is the standard: very detailed with lots of learning. The format is clear and the Introduction ties together Lucan theology in Luke/Acts. But conservative students of the Bible may have a hard time with his source criticism. It is always of interest to see what Fitzmyer has to say on any subject, but this two-volume set is also quite expensive.

John:

1. F.F. Bruce, Eerdmans (not part of a series)
2. Raymond Brown, Anchor, 2 Volumes

Bruce's work is a straightforward commentary of the biblical text that emphasizes the new age of salvation from John's perspective. It also contains a good deal of pertinent background information that relates to the context. For the most part it avoids reading Nicean ideas back into the text. Brown's commentary is something of a classic and comes in two volumes that are filled with many insightful comments and very good notes on the text. Brown also aims to summarize and interact with all major commentaries on John before his. Be prepared for a lot of speculation on setting, sources, etc. as well as a major dose of sacramentalism in this work.

Acts:

1. F.F. Bruce, NICNT

Comparatively speaking, there are not that many good commentaries available on the Book of Acts but this is one. It is a solid commentary by Bruce in a clear format. It is especially good at showing the NT fulfillment of OT themes throughout. This commentary also provides an opportunity to tap into Bruce's wide and deep knowledge of the historical background of the NT which is so necessary to understanding both Acts and the NT Letters.

Romans:

1. F.F. Bruce, Tyndale

2. Douglass Moo, NICNT
3. Joseph Fitzmyer, Anchor

Here are three first class commentaries in ascending order of technicality. Bruce's commentary is compact and concise but in no way lacking in theological content. It is a wonderful exposition of the gospel message throughout with an extremely helpful Introduction. Moo's massive commentary is well written, readable, thorough and presents all the reasonable views on the various issues while still firmly supporting his own. Most of the technical matters in this commentary are kept in the footnotes at the bottom of each page. I have a hard time with his Calvinistic interpretations of Rom. 9-11 but on many other issues he is very good indeed and this will surely become a standard for evangelicals. Joseph Fitzmyer's commentary on Romans is simply the best. It is a masterpiece of learning, precision and sound judgment. Though detailed, it is presented in a very clear format. The Introduction offers a superb summary of Paul's theology. Of the many other commentaries on Romans that truly have something to offer Fitzmyer's contribution stands out for its overall clarity and its scope and understanding of every aspect of the subject. Any student of Romans should have this commentary for constant reference.

I Corinthians:

1. Richard B. Hays, Interpr.
2. Gordon Fee, NICNT

These are two outstanding commentaries and both are highly recommended for those who have a special interest in this book of the Bible. Hays' commentary is full of insightful and forceful remarks from beginning to end with a lot that you won't find anywhere else. It's easy to read and a joy to read. Fee's commentary is a blend of extremely detailed scholarly work and pointed comments that need to be heard by many in the church today. Both commentaries are very good on the "spiritual matters" of I Cor. 12-14 and on "eschatological" thought throughout - esp. chap. 15. In short, students of I Corinthians are very well served by these two commentaries.

II Corinthians:

1. Colin Kruse, Tyndale

This is a brief, solid commentary that is easy to read and follow but not lacking in insightful commentary. Well written with sound judgment throughout.

Galatians:

1. R. Alan Cole, Tyndale
2. Ronald Y. K. Fung, NICNT
3. F.F. Bruce, NIGTC

Cole's commentary is a clear and excellent exposition of the heart of the gospel as set forth in Galatians despite its brevity. Fung's work offers a detailed exposition of justification by faith together with a good understanding and presentation of the many other issues in Galatians as well such as the role of the Spirit, continuity between the OT and New, etc. Bruce's commentary is detailed and extremely precise. The NIGTC format in this case is not difficult to follow even if you can't read Greek.

Ephesians:

1. Francis Foulkes, Tyndale
2. F. F. Bruce, NICNT with Colossians & Philemon
3. Andrew Lincoln, WBC

Foulkes' commentary is quite good and a good value despite its brevity. For insightful understanding of Paul's thought Bruce's commentary is first class and it comes together in one volume with his commentary on Colossians and Philemon. This is my favorite and its a super value! Lincoln's commentary is both detailed, massive and theologically rich. It is loaded with valuable information but also loaded with Greek and the WBC series, though excellent for serious students, is not easy to follow.

Philippians:

1. Gordon Fee, NICNT
2. Gerald Hawthorne, WBC

These commentaries have a lot to offer in understanding Paul's theology and thought within the setting of this Letter. Unfortunately, they both offer only the traditional understanding of Phil. 2:5ff. but their comments on 1:21ff are more open in noting the difficulties of this text in light of Paul's statements elsewhere. Anyone who can find G.B. Caird's *Paul's Letters from Prison* (OP) would be

well advised to do so. This is one of the best commentaries on Philippians by a noted NT scholar and is also an excellent commentary on Paul's other prison Letters.

Colossians:

1. N.T. Wright, Tyndale
2. F.F. Bruce, NICNT with Ephesians and Philemon.
3. James D.G. Dunn, NIGTC with Philemon

Wright's commentary is a good introduction to his understanding of Paul and is full of insightful comments. Wright is one of the chief debaters with and opponents of the ridiculous theories of the Jesus Seminar. Though he goes beyond the text in reaching some Nicean conclusions at times there is much to be learned in this commentary. Bruce's work is solid as usual and comes in one volume with his commentary on Ephesians and Philemon. James Dunn offers a great deal in his commentary that you won't find anywhere else - especially in his understanding of Col. 1:15ff. Above all, he offers a solid and consistent exposition of the text in the light of true Jewish/Christian monotheism.

I & II Thessalonians:

1. David Williams, NIBC
2. F.F. Bruce, WBC

The NIV Study Bible has excellent notes on I and II Thessalonians and most people won't need much more than that. Williams' commentary is good, especially if it is used with, and compared with, The NIV Study Bible notes. The end-notes after each chapter are especially good. Bruce's detailed work is first class and is a model of sound scholarship. It is cautious in judgments about matters that are debatable from the text. He sets forth the major alternative views, then his own judgments and usually states clearly what is, and is not, known for sure.

I & II Timothy and Titus:

1. Gordon Fee, NIBC

Generally good commentary with a strong defense of Paul's authorship and a good Introduction and Notes.

Hebrews:

1. F.F. Bruce, NICNT

An excellent commentary throughout with the usual solid emphasis on the continuity and liberating effects of the new covenant gospel message that is so characteristic of Bruce.

James:

1. Douglas Moo, Tyndale
2. Peter Davids, NIBC

The notes in the NIV Study Bible are excellent on James. Moo's work is solid and doesn't go in for speculation beyond the plain meaning of the text. Davids' is good, with good end-notes, but should be compared with Moo's, especially on the subject of "works" and on the setting of the Letter.

I Peter:

1. Peter Davids, NICNT
2. J. Ramsey Michaels, WBC

Both of these are excellent commentaries on I Peter with a good grasp of the main themes and are very helpful on the more difficult sections. Davids' is much easier to read and follow but Michaels' has a lot of interesting detail and sound comments.

II Peter & Jude

1. Richard Bauckham, WBC

Its better to use Study Bibles, etc. for help on these short Letters unless one really wants to dig deep. For those interested there is much to be learned from Bauckham's massive work.

I, II & III John:

1. I. H. Marshall, NICNT

A straightforward exposition of the text with a good presentation of the balance necessary in understanding the semitic language of John with his use of absolutes such as "light and darkness," "love and hate," etc.

Revelation:

1. Robert Wall, NIBC
2. Robert Mounce, NICNT

From these two commentaries you'll get most of the different points of view that are worth considering about the Book of Revelation. No book of the Bible is more controversial and no book has been more

divisive for Bible believing Christians. The Book of Revelation must be understood in the light of its original intent and setting. When it is not possible to do this because of lack of understanding of background, symbolism, etc. then it should be frankly admitted and all speculation should be clearly labeled as such. Simply put, any interpretation of the Book of Revelation should not be allowed to override the clearness and simplicity of Christian beliefs and practices that are set forth consistently throughout the rest of the NT. Both Robert Wall and Robert Mounce each do a good job of keeping things in balance in their commentaries on Revelation. Both have good introductory comments on the book as a whole as well as before each individual chapter. Wall's end-notes after each chapter often cull the best from the works of other commentators who preceded him. But his commentary is less than thorough on some points of controversy. Mounce's recently revised commentary is generally considered the standard among conservative evangelicals. It is generally solid throughout, though one could certainly wish for more detailed and open minded exposition on certain sections. The major detailed scholarly commentaries on Revelation by Charles (ICC), Ford (Anchor), Aune (WBC), et al., are loaded with information but

are also loaded with speculation - mostly about source critical matters - some of which is nonsense and most of the rest of which is simply impossible to verify.

Abbreviations (in order of increasing complexity):

Tyndale: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
NIBC: New International Biblical Commentary
Interpr: Interpretation
Expositors: Expositors Bible Commentary
NCBC: New Century Bible Commentary (OP)
NICNT: New International Commentary on the NT
Anchor: Anchor Bible Commentary
WBC: Word Biblical Commentary
NIGTC: New International Greek Testament Commentary
ICC: International Critical Commentary

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