

HOW

DO YOU

KNOW

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RIGHT?

A Study in Spiritual Knowledge

Phil Enlow

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Foreword

The chapters of this book are drawn from a series of five articles published in the Midnight Cry Messenger. They are designed to get the reader to think, to challenge his or her spiritual assumptions. If there has ever been a time in the history of this sin-torn world when God's people needed a foundation of spiritual knowledge, it is now. We are witnessing the death-throes of a civilization as Satan is being allowed to seduce and deceive man on an unprecedented scale.

The mere number and diversity of religious groups each crying, "This is the way!" should alone cause us to question. How have we come to believe what we consider to be truth? Have we been taught of men by tradition or of God by the anointing? Can we know? If so, how?

I challenge the reader to read prayerfully and with a heart desiring truth. The Lord can see our hearts and recognizes when we really desire it. He certainly does not desire His children to continue in division and confusion. If you read something you don't understand or are not inclined because of previous exposure to believe, just "put it on the shelf" and seek God, resting in Him until He gives His witness. I rest my case in His faithful hands: He will bear witness to all that is of Him.

Chapter 1

Why Do Professing Christians Differ?

It has not been at all unusual throughout the ministry of Brother Thomas for religious people of every hue and stripe to attempt to “straighten him out.” Sometimes they feel he is in outright error — in their assessment — and at other times that there is not a sufficient emphasis upon their “pet doctrine” or practice.

Often following ministry Brother Thomas has had to endure the well-meaning zeal of someone who would corner him to explain what he ought to say and do and emphasize. Not a few letters over the years have arrived, often with enclosed literature, sent not with a free spirit to bless and encourage, but with a subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, spirit to correct, to contend for their version of Christianity.

There is such a diversity of opinion that prevails under the umbrella of what passes for Christianity that it can only be characterized as “Babylon.” “Babylon” means confusion. Its meaning is rooted in the confusion of language that God brought about at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11) to thwart men’s efforts to unite in rebellion against Him.

The religious confusion we see today is the result of men’s efforts to build and preserve their concepts of the Kingdom of God. Men contend, not for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3), but for that of the Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, Holiness, etc. Is God the author of confusion (I Cor. 14:33)? What is it that causes men to hold and contend for such obviously conflicting religious views?

We are shaped more by our environment than we realize. If we are exposed to a particular belief long enough we tend to believe it. To us it becomes “the law and the gospel.” In addition it becomes a yard stick by which we measure and evaluate others. Unless God intervenes it never occurs to us to question whether our ideas are really so or not. To us, we’re right and others who differ are wrong.

Religious ideas not of God are undoubtedly the worst prison in our world (Is. 42:22). Few escape from this prison. It offers men the delusion that they are thereby acceptable to God when in fact they are being bound into bundles and made ready for the fire (Matt. 13:30).

Religious Environment

Most religious men are simply a product of their religious environment, conditioned to believe and promote whatever ideas hold sway in that environment. Whatever measure of tradition and error is there is taken in and forms the unconscious foundation of their thinking.

We are constituted as human beings in such a way that there are ideas so deeply rooted in us that we are not even conscious that they are there. When we work out a simple arithmetic problem we do not stop to question whether $1 + 1 = 2$. That is assumed. It is the foundation of mathematics. It is something we “know” and no longer have to think about. What would happen if someone tried to become a math teacher whose basic assumption was that $1 + 1 = 3$?

All human thought and reasoning works this way. Certain things are “known” to be true and just accepted. At one time reasonable men “knew” that the earth was flat and that if you went far enough you’d fall off! Today we laugh at such a notion and take pride in all the things we “know” as a result of modern science.

In every religious group, they similarly “know” many things that are transmitted from generation to generation without serious question. Yet down the street is another group that “knows” very differently.

Take a look around. How do you know you are right? How do you know anything? Are you wise and prudent — a serious pursuer of religious knowledge? Jesus said that his Father had “hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.” Matt. 11:25. Can you discover what God has hidden? Paul said “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” I Cor. 1:21.

“But,” you say, “I’ve been taught by Rev. so-and-so. He’s a real sincere, spiritual man who can explain the Bible well. He’s been to school and ...” (You fill in the qualifications that impress you and cause you to receive someone as God’s representative.)

How do you know? What qualifies you to judge whether something or someone is of God or not? Your intelligence? Your religious sincerity? Bible study? A religious teacher you heard and were impressed by? Things you “know” to be true? Why are you any more qualified than the fellow down the street who is just like you and yet “knows” differently?

Are you afraid to question? Do you prefer to plunge ahead, blindly contending for “your” faith? Will your spiritual foundation stand?

This is no time for uncertainty. Christ is coming and only those who are ready will go in with him. Matt. 25:10. Multitudes will be shocked on that

day to discover that the religion, of which they had been so sure, had been in vain. Matt. 7:21-23. Where will you be on that day? How can you know?

Can We Know?

Is there any reason to believe we can know, or has God deliberately left us in a state of uncertainty? Are we each to pursue his own conception of truth? Is one way as good as another?

You cannot read the book of Ephesians without being aware of the great desire of the Lord toward His people, expressed through Paul, that "... we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ." Eph. 4:13-15.

Eph. 5:25-27 tells us that "... Christ ... loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

The conflicting traditions of men will never prepare the church for Christ's coming. Only an ever-more-pure stream of revelation from Christ, the Head of the Church can accomplish that.

Yet the condition of the world in general is a desperate one. Isaiah 60:2 says, "For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people ..."

Rom. 3:11 says, "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God."

Chapter 2

The Author of Confusion

Earlier, we pointed out that God is not the author of confusion. Make no mistake, however: there is an author. The diversity and confusion we observe in religion did not just happen.

In II Cor. 4:4, Paul says that "... the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

The "god of this world" is, of course, Satan. When Satan fell, he led one third of the angels with him (Rev. 12:3-4). Jude 6 refers to them as being "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." This expresses their hopeless condition before God. Their "chains" in no way prevent them from blinding, deceiving, corrupting, and leading lost mankind down the road to destruction.

Especially in our day, Satan and his hosts are loose as never before and men are defenseless without truth. As the coming of the Lord draws near we can expect the hold of darkness to grow greater and stronger upon the world as a whole. Rev. 12:12. Matt. 24:37-39. Gen. 6:5.

When Satan realized the absolute victory that Christ won at the cross, his only recourse was to do all in his power to oppose and hinder the outworking of that victory. The only arena in which he is free to operate is this earth realm. Those who have died in Christ are forever beyond his reach! Praise the Lord!

Over the centuries, outright persecution of believers has not been unusual. *Fox's Book of Martyrs* chronicles some of Satan's efforts in this regard. Of course it also chronicles God's great faithfulness to those who have been called to glory by that route!

However, by far Satan's most effective tactic has been to join and then to corrupt the church. He has come to man masquerading as Christ, presenting himself as a spiritual friend. Paul said, "... Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." II Cor. 11:14. The next verse refers to "his ministers." Satan has ministers who undoubtedly appear to be ministers of Christ.

II Cor. 11:4 speaks of "another Jesus," "another spirit," and "another gospel." This is a pretty good description of what is symbolically pictured in Rev. 12:15 as a flood coming from the serpent's mouth.

Even as Christ is purifying the Church by the “washing of water by the word,” so is Satan corrupting and deceiving mankind with a flood of doctrines and philosophies that come from his mouth. Much of this flood is religious in nature and is designed to subvert the influence of truth.

The reason Satan is so successful is that his ideas appeal to the fallen nature of man. This is pictured in Rev. 12:16 where it says that “... the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.” Satan’s ideas are easily “drunk in” by the natural or “earth” man.

The truth of God confronts the desperate condition of man without compromise. It offers nothing but the absolute sentence of death to the old nature while it gives newness of life and everlasting hope to the repentant sinner. Rom. 6:3-4.

Satan, on the other hand, accommodates human nature, allowing it to live and flourish. It is the same as if a supposed doctor were to treat a terrible disease by feeding and encouraging the disease while covering up some of the more obvious symptoms. Jer. 6:13-14.

Mankind is “infected” with sin, a self-willed, self-pleasing rebellion against divine authority. This rebellion is especially manifest when that authority is expressed through men.

What religion does is to clean up the outward man and make him appear to be righteous while leaving the inward man unchanged and, in time, unchangeable. Matt. 23:2-39. There comes a time when God ceases to deal with those who receive not “the love of the truth.” The result is not simply delusion but **strong** delusion. II Thess. 2:10-12.

Strong delusion is being absolutely sure you are right, but you are wrong.

Invasion of the Church

When Christianity came on the scene, the Roman Empire was in power. Rome was also the spiritual center of the religion that had its roots in Babylon. The religious life of Rome was dominated by a hierarchy of priests who led the people in pagan idolatry. Behind the priests ruled wicked religious spirits, appointed to their tasks by Lucifer himself. These were the same spirits that had once operated in ancient Babylon when that was a political power.

For approximately three centuries, Satan stirred up ten major periods of severe persecution against Christians. Then, early in the 4th century, there was an astonishing turnaround. One Caesar persecuted the church; the next, Constantine, supposedly was converted and joined the church; then one of

Constantine's successors in a relatively short time actually made Christianity the exclusive state religion of Rome and persecuted others!

What actually happened was the wholesale invasion of the church by Lucifer and his hosts. The religious demons from Babylon swarmed in, outwardly adopting Christianity. They established under the banner of Christ many doctrines and practices that can only be described as thinly disguised paganism while sucking out the heart of the "Church." Multitudes of pagans were baptized, submitting, not to the authority of Christ, but to the authority of Rome and its official religion.

Over the centuries many daughters have been born to this mother (Rev. 17:5). Despite some promising beginnings, none to date have escaped this Babylonian captivity.

Satan has a great host of wicked spirits with 2000 years of experience in promoting the wide variety of religion operating under the banner of "Christianity" while causing men to sidestep the Lordship of Christ and the new birth.

Demons are real beings with individual personalities and abilities. Some spirits have become adept at being Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Holiness, etc. — that is, they promote those forms of religion apart from the true power of Christ.

Some spirits seek out people who are impressed by dignified formal religion with a lot of ritual and ceremony. Others seek those who are intellectual and puffed up with their supposed knowledge while despising the ignorance of others. Other spirits seek out those who crave feelings and experiences.

Many today are resting their hope in a religion that is "real" because they can "feel" it. Multitudes have received a false "baptism of the Spirit" because they sought after a sign. Matt. 12:39. I Cor. 1:22.

There are many warnings in the scriptures of religious deception, specially toward the end of the age. Matt. 24:3-5, Matt. 24:23-26, II Peter 2, II Thess. 2:9-12, II Tim. 3:1-8, I John 4:1, II John 7, Rev. 12:12.

I Tim. 4:1-2 says, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron."

Chapter 3

God's Remnant

In the face of such darkness and delusion that grips our world is there hope? That's what Elijah wondered when he prayed to die (I Kings 19:4). He thought he was all alone and that the situation was hopeless but the Lord told Elijah that He had reserved seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to Baal (Rom. 11:2-4).

With God it's never hopeless. He has always had His remnant, set apart by His Spirit, reserved and preserved to Himself in spite of religious darkness. Even today there is a very small remnant, many scattered throughout the systems of men and devils, some asleep, yet capable of hearing the Master's voice.

His voice is crying in this hour, "Wake Up!" "Come out of Babylon!" "Get ready!" "I'm about to return!"

We have Christ's promise that "he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth." Rom. 9:28. I believe that we are in that short quick work right now!

Rev. 10:7 says, "But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets." The seventh angel is the last one to sound his trumpet. His trumpet marks the end of the age, the return of Christ and the destruction of this present creation. Rev. 11:15-18, I Cor. 15:52, II Thess. 1:7-10, I Peter 3:10-12.

Notice the expression "the **days** of the voice." The sounding of this last trumpet is not just one great blast but is a message and a signal that covers a span of time, known to God but unknown to us. We can, however, "know that it is near, even at the doors." Matt. 24:33.

The Mystery Finished

What occurs as this last angel begins to sound is "the mystery of God" being "finished." This is the clear revelation of truth necessary for the finishing of the work. As the remnant church receives and is transformed by this revelation of Christ, she will be made ready for the climax of this last trump: the return of our Lord, when we will be changed, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." I Cor. 15:52.

The last angel has begun to sound. The voice of the Son of God is in the earth to awaken and prepare His people. Our world is filled with religious voices, each crying, "This is the way! Walk ye in it." God's people have been scattered, divided and put to sleep by the influence of these many voices. That time is about over. Christ both desires and has purposed that we should in this last hour positively recognize and give heed to His voice. It is the time of the Midnight Cry. Matt. 25:1-13.

How can you know? How can you distinguish His voice? How can you avoid the great deception of which Jesus warned?

Chapter 4

The Beginning of Knowledge

The foundation of spiritual knowledge is expressed in Prov. 1:7. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

Man, by nature, does not fear God (Rom. 3:18). He is proud, arrogant, rebellious, self-reliant, presumptuous and a long list of similar attributes. Some brands of religion teach their followers a kind of fear of God but it is a fear “taught by the precept of men” (Is. 29:13). This kind of “fear” only produces religious professors who draw nigh to God with their lips but whose hearts are far from Him.

The only fear that is of any value whatsoever is that taught by God himself. Job reached a place where he said to God, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” Job 42:5-6.

Job was allowed by God to go through a place of deep and heart-rending trial. The Lord waited while Job and his friends tried in vain to use their religious knowledge to explain what had happened to him. Then, at the proper time, the Lord intervened and Job acquired a different kind of knowledge — a knowledge that only comes when God steps in and reveals Himself in some measure to a human heart.

This kind of revelation isn’t necessarily a phenomenal experience. Most often it is simply an inward awareness that there is a God who is great and over all and that we are small, weak, ignorant and needy before Him.

Such knowledge comes only from God Himself and creates a fear — a deep respect for this great Being that works to restrain our sinful presumption. It is not salvation but it is the beginning of true spiritual knowledge that starts God’s elect on the road to salvation.

Whenever one of God’s elect encounters Him in any measure, there is a corresponding degree of awareness of what we as human beings are in contrast. We are naturally prone to measuring ourselves by other human beings. We are so corrupt that we are even secretly glad at the weakness of others because it feeds the pride that causes us to feel that we are better than they are.

But when we see ourselves in the light of God’s greatness, holiness, wisdom, power, etc., our perception changes dramatically. Job said, “I

abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.” Job 42:6. Isaiah said, “. . . Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” Is. 6:5.

Sincerely Wrong

Paul is a classic example first of a religious man, then later on of a man who came into possession of true spiritual knowledge. He recounts his religious qualifications in Phil. 3:4-6. It is an impressive list and shows the degree to which he excelled in the religion of the Pharisees.

No one could deny that he was very zealous and sincere. He himself wrote in Rom. 10:2 of those who had a zeal for God but not according to knowledge.

Sincerity is good but it is no guarantee of spiritual success. Suppose a man is traveling along a road that leads to New York. But suppose also that his sincere belief and intention is to go to Chicago. All the sincerity in the world will not alter his destination. If his ignorance and error are not corrected he will most surely arrive in New York if he continues his present course.

This is a picture of most religion. Had God not sovereignly intervened, Paul (or Saul as he was then known) would most certainly have continued on his Pharisaical course. He probably would have perished when Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D. He would have perished certain of his standing before God. But he was wrong!

Are you as zealous and sincere as Saul of Tarsus was? If he could be as sincerely wrong as he was, how do you know you are right?

Dependence Upon God

One of the key truths revealed in the life of Paul is that of the sovereignty of God. Nothing but a sovereign act of God could have stopped Saul. One minute he was a self-righteous, self-confident Pharisee, zealously seeking to stamp out what he thought was heresy against God; the next he was reduced to blindness and utter need.

For three days he waited in darkness for someone sent by the Christ he had formerly hated to come and tell him what to do! What a transformation!

Closely coupled with this truth is the knowledge of our utter and complete dependence upon God. How helpless we are if He does not first make Himself known to us and work with our proud, hard hearts.

Prov. 16:5 says, “Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord...” God has seen to it that we all occupy the place of blind, helpless, needy sinners totally dependent on His grace. There is no room for boasting. Rom. 3:27. Eph. 2:8-9.

If anyone is “in Christ” it is because God has taken the initiative. There is no room for “flesh” to glory in God’s presence. I Cor. 1:27-31.

In John 5:30, Jesus said, “I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.” How is it that so many religious people today are so sure of themselves? What kind of a spirit is it that produces such presumption?

The only reasonable place for us is one of humility and submission before a great and holy God before whom we will one day stand and give an account. “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” James 4:6.

I Cor. 8:2 says, “And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.” There is no room for being cocksure and complacent in God.

One key ingredient of true spiritual knowledge is the keen awareness that we are helpless undeserving sinners. We have touched on this but it needs further emphasis.

When any human being truly encounters God and is allowed to “see” Him in any measure as He is, that person also sees himself for what he is. Job abhorred himself. Isaiah saw himself and all his people as “unclean.”

When Jesus revealed himself to Peter and his fellow fishermen in a miraculous fish catch, Peter’s response is described in Luke 5:8: “When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

As surely as we are utterly dependent upon God for spiritual knowledge, so are we dependent upon God for our righteousness. Any approach to God based on any righteousness we might think we possess is wasted effort. God has no respect for any man who imagines that he is acceptable and qualified to approach Him through anything he is, or anything he has done, is doing or intends to do. Read Luke 18:9-14 about the Pharisee and Publican who went to the temple to pray.

What Kind of Man?

God desires to reveal Himself and to enter into a relationship with men, but He is looking for a certain kind of man. Is. 66:2 says, “... but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” See also Is. 57:15.

Jesus said in Matt. 18:3, “And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Most men are far too proud to take the place of a child before God. Yet, in reality, what are we before His greatness?

Read Solomon's prayer for wisdom (I Kings 3:6-9). In particular he said in verse 7, "...I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in." That is a good place to occupy.

False religious knowledge produces evil fruit in all who are influenced by it in any measure — even God's elect. That fruit includes such things as pride, presumption, complacency, spirits of division, zeal, ambition and other such things.

It's good if we can say from our hearts, "Lord, I don't know anything as I ought to know it and I'm totally dependent upon you. I desire to know what you want me to know, whatever will bring glory to you and help to fulfill your sovereign will in my life."

Central Key

The central key to all spiritual knowledge is set forth in Matt. 16:13-20. Jesus first asked his disciples, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" They responded, "Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets."

Then Jesus wanted to know what they thought. Peter's answer is recorded in verse 16: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

In verse 17 Jesus highlighted the difference between Peter's understanding and that of men in general. Peter was a blessed man because God Himself had revealed it to him. The alternative source of "revelation" was flesh and blood — the opinions and ideas of men.

This difference is critical because revelation is the rock upon which Christ is building his church (vs. 18). It is the only foundation that will stand. All else is shifting sand that can only lead to spiritual ruin in the end (Lk. 6:46-49).

For any communication of knowledge to qualify as revelation there must be a personal active present tense involvement by God Himself.

Man in his natural state knows nothing about God nor does he care. All he cares about is following his natural inclinations and seeking to gratify his natural desires. Rom. 3:9-18. I John 2:15-17. All that he is and knows and does is corrupted by sin and spiritual blindness. II Cor. 4:3-4. He calls evil good and good evil. Is. 5:20.

No man ever comes into possession of spiritual knowledge without the direct personal intervention of God. I Cor. 2:9-14.

Chapter 5

Preparation

The first work that God does in His elect is a work of preparation. Confronting an unprepared heart with the gospel is like a farmer who tries to raise a crop without breaking up the ground or who tries to sow his seed among thorns. Jer. 4:3.

This is the reason men respond differently to the gospel. In John 6:44-45 Jesus said, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.” The natural man hates this truth because he is a rebel, but it is the truth nonetheless.

Jesus was certainly God’s voice to his generation. The only ones able to recognize him and receive his ministry were those sovereignly prepared by God.

In Jesus’ day the primary means God used to prepare men for Christ was the ministry of John the Baptist. Luke 1:17. Luke 3:3-6. The effect of John’s ministry on those who heard Jesus is noted in Luke 7:29-30: “And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.”

In general, the work of God to prepare men’s hearts is as varied as are those who experience that work. Even among God’s elect we differ one from another as does God’s purpose and plan for each individual.

In broad terms, however, this work is one of revelation — God making Himself known in some measure perhaps through the creation, or in some experience, or in someone who has Christ in them. There may be exposure, perhaps as a child, to some anointed ministry of the word that makes a lasting impression upon the heart, an awareness of God.

It is not the circumstances themselves that bring about this awareness, however. Two people could travel life’s road side by side and experience similar things yet one be softened and prepared for the gospel and the other untouched or even hardened.

Jacob and Esau were brothers — they had the same environment, the same father and mother — yet see how differently they turned out. Though

Jacob was by nature a schemer, yet God brought him to a place where he became Israel, a prince of God (Gen. 32:28).

Esau was a profane man, interested solely in what his flesh needed and desired. He saw no real value in his birthright. He totally missed the spiritual significance of being heir to Abraham and Isaac. Even when he realized he had lost out and begged for his father's blessing, I doubt he understood what he had lost. He saw only the natural blessing of being heir to a wealthy man. Gen. 27:34. Heb. 12:16-17.

God has, down through the ages, similarly separated men and women unto Himself, revealing Himself by various means — according to His own schedule — that their hearts might be made ready to receive the King, who died and rose again that we might live and reign with him forever! Hallelujah!

Seeing the Kingdom

One thing needs to be made clear, however. Unless a man is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God (John 3:3). Even one prepared of God is still a natural man until he experiences the new birth. I Cor. 2:14 says, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

He may be around a true ministry of the word. He may be able, through his natural intellect, to grasp in a measure many of the ideas and teachings that pertain to God's kingdom and its citizens. He may even seem to be able to put them into words in such a way that you would think he truly understood. Yet, unless he is born again, such a religious profession — in reality a religious effort — is in vain. Like the house built upon the sand it may appear to be very solid and impressive, but let just the right conditions arise and it will be evident that the necessary foundation is lacking. The house will fall and the ruin will be great (Luke 6:49).

No religious "house" will succeed that is built upon that which is merely human. No amount of intellect, will power, zeal, resolve, self-righteousness or human effort of any kind will avail.

Chapter 6

Becoming Sons of God

When Jesus was asked if there were few who would be saved his answer in Luke 13:24 makes it obvious that that is the case: “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

Multitudes are putting forth a religious effort of some kind believing that they can thereby be acceptable to God. Paul spoke in Rom. 10:2-3 of his fellow Jews: “For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.”

If the fear of God is the beginning of spiritual knowledge and a work of separation and preparation is a necessary part of the foundation, then the new birth is the door. Only after we pass through that door do we begin to see God’s Kingdom as it truly is — and even then, seeing is a process.

This is why Jesus stressed the need of those who professed belief to become disciples — learners — thereby coming into possession of truth that would make them free. John 8:31-32. In reality many of them were children of the devil (John 8:44).

Receiving Christ

John said this of Jesus in John 1:11-13: “He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

This truth is greatly misunderstood in our day. The modern concept of “receiving Christ” as praying a little prayer to Jesus in the sky to invite Him into one’s heart fits in well with the easy-believism that has filled churches with lost men and women who know nothing of the new birth. Make no mistake, however — there is no new birth unless Christ, by the Spirit, takes up both residence and possession of our hearts.

The tragedy in our day is that most religious conversion has nothing to do with Christ, but is an empty form devoid of spiritual reality. It has a form of godliness but denies (or resists) the power thereof. II Tim. 3:5.

God's Authority

The focus in John 1:12 is on obtaining the “power” or right or privilege of becoming a son of God. A “right” is a legal privilege that is granted by rightful authority.

God Himself is the only true authority in the universe and only that which flows from Him and is in accord with His Sovereign will constitutes rightful authority.

This great God has placed all authority into the hands of His Son, Jesus Christ, who said, “All power” (authority) “is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” Matt. 28:18. The relationship is such that what the Son does perfectly represents and is fully backed up by the Father. Reject Christ and you reject God. It's that simple.

Phil. 2:9-11 says, “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

No one can bypass the Son and get to God. John 14:6. He alone has the commission from the Father to establish a kingdom that will last forever. Isaiah 9:7 says, “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”

Daniel 7:13-14 says, “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”

Religious Authority

The Jews' religion of Jesus' day had long since degenerated into a dead form, full of tradition that made of none effect the word of God. Matt. 15:3-9.

Although they could trace their roots to God's revelation through Moses, any authority God might have exercised over them had been long rejected. Their religion was firmly in their own hands. Authority was vested in the Sanhedrin, a high council of 71 members consisting of chief priests, elders and teachers of the law.

Over the centuries, religious leaders had attempted, without inspiration, to interpret and apply the law of Moses to different situations, resulting in a great body of tradition. When a question arose, they resorted, not to the law itself, sincerely desiring to be guided in their understanding by God, but to their traditional interpretations. It was a lot like a modern judge who searches out a legal precedent established by some prior case and then makes his decision accordingly.

There existed among the Jews more than one brand (or denomination!) of religion. They had their conservative, bible-believing fundamentalists — the Pharisees. Paul grew up as a Pharisee. Their focus — though badly corrupted by tradition — was on scrupulous adherence to the letter of the law. If someone deviated in the least from **their concept** of observing the law he was in trouble. Matt. 15:1-2.

Another sect was the Sadducees (Acts 23:7-8), the “liberals” of their day, who didn’t believe in the supernatural or life after death but focussed their attention on social and political issues.

Another sect, though not mentioned in the Bible, were the Essenes, who mostly lived apart from Jewish society as a whole in very secretive communes. Their traditions involved a very strict code of conduct, perhaps cultlike in their concept of observing the law. Few married and their membership depended mostly on new converts.

Of course there were the political zealots who were mainly concerned with throwing off the shackles of Rome by any means possible.

It’s not difficult to relate these religious variations to similar groups and religious types throughout history, including the present day.

Although they varied among themselves, one thing they shared in common was that they despised and rejected any authority that truly represented God. In Luke 20:2, the Jewish leaders wanted to know by what authority Jesus did the things he did. Their question led to the parable of the vineyard (verses 9-18). Jesus perfectly pictured the actions of the custodians of Jewish religion over the centuries in consistently rejecting anyone sent of God.

Hear the ringing indictment of Stephen before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7:51-53: “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.”

Hear also the words of Jesus in Matt. 23:37-38: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent

unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.”

Notice that Jesus said, “How often would I have gathered ...” Christ was the One who spoke to Abraham, who raised up Moses, who led the Israelites to Canaan, who anointed and sent the prophets. He was the Rock that followed them in the wilderness (I Cor. 10:4). Now present among them in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, He was about to be crucified.

Spiritual blindness had resulted in the Jewish leaders rejecting the authority of Christ and bringing judgment upon themselves and their followers. I Thess. 2:14-16.

Christ has the authority of God. It is not for Him to bow to us; it is for us to bow to Him. He is either Lord of all or not Lord at all. Jesus said in Luke 6:46, “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”

In one sense the Jewish leaders recognized the need for authority in religion but the authority in their religion was firmly in human hands. When Saul set out for Damascus he had letters from the council authorizing him to stamp out the new heresy. Their authority was used at every opportunity to oppose God’s authority manifest in the anointing .

Those Christ Sends

We’re speaking of receiving Christ. Jesus said in John 13:20, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.” Here Jesus describes a chain of authority that reaches all the way to God’s throne.

It is evident here that “receiving Christ” was not some mystical thing but rather was a matter of receiving a fellow human being as an authorized representative of God, sent to proclaim His words. Peter, because it was revealed to him, saw Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the Living God,” (Matt. 16:16) and he recognized that Jesus had “the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

Paul wrote to the Galatians referring to the time when he came to them with the gospel and said, “ye ... received me as an angel of God, even as Jesus Christ.” Gal. 4:14. “Angel” means messenger. Obviously they had received Paul, yet not just as Paul, but as one sent by God to officially represent Jesus Christ. Did they thereby receive Christ? Yes!

It was exactly the same as if Jesus of Nazareth Himself had come to them and they had received Him as God’s messenger. The Word of reconciliation had been committed to Paul (II Cor. 5:18-20).

At the end of Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem he said, “Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the

Lord.” Coming in His name means having His authority, officially representing Him.

This is easily illustrated by the way earthly nations conduct their affairs. Nations are represented by ambassadors, who have authority to speak for their respective nations. In addition there are other officials in the embassy or perhaps in a consulate who have various levels of authority under the ambassador. To despise the ambassador is to despise the nation he represents.

Suppose for a moment that there is a nation called Paradise that is ruled over by a king. Suppose also that you have a great desire to go there. How would you proceed?

You might — in great presumption — simply travel to Paradise and seek to enter without a visa — the proper authorization. If you did, it is certain that you would be turned away. You would be like the man who came to the wedding without the proper wedding garment in Matt. 22:11-14.

You might take the attitude, “I’ll deal only with the King.” How far would you get with that approach? You would in reality be rejecting the King’s authority which has been given to embassy officials to help those desiring to go to his country.

Jesus said to his disciples in Luke 10:16, “He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.” It’s not a good idea to hastily reject a ministry: how do you know God hasn’t sent him? Reject one sent by Christ and you reject Christ and, in turn, God Himself.

The King of Paradise has a way he conducts business. If you want to go there, it is absolutely necessary that you bow to his authority even in the matter of obtaining a visa to come.

No Other Way

You could, of course, attempt to bypass all authority and enter Paradise illegally. In John 10:9 Jesus referred to himself as the door to the sheepfold of salvation. In verse 1 of that chapter he said, “He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.”

The key phrase there is “some other way.” Of course there is no other way that will avail, but multitudes in spiritual blindness have sought to enter the kingdom of God some other way than by seeing and hearing and bowing to Christ’s authority given to those He has sent.

If you want to go to Paradise you must go to the embassy or to a consulate and do what they tell you to. They would assign a certain official

to your case and he alone would represent the entire Kingdom of Paradise so far as you're concerned.

There might be other officials with similar authority assigned to other cases but you would have to submit your case to the one assigned to you. You couldn't say, "I don't particularly like this man," and go off down the hall in search of an official more to your liking. It's not your choice.

If you wish to go to Paradise you must submit yourself to the authority of the King and do things his way, even down to the matter of who in particular is to represent him to you. If you cannot submit yourself to the King in a small matter such as this, why should he expect you to recognize his authority in any other matter? Should he fling open the gates of Paradise and fill his kingdom with rebels?

Ananias was specifically assigned to the case of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:10-18). Saul didn't have the option of picking "the church of his choice" or the minister that suited his personal taste. Had he rejected Ananias he would have been rejecting the Christ who had sent him.

Cornelius had been prepared by God for salvation and was doing all he knew to do. However, when it came time for him to be born into God's kingdom, he was told that Peter had been assigned to his case (Acts 10:1-6).

The Ethiopian Eunuch had a ready heart and was reading the scriptures with a desire to understand yet it was necessary for the Lord to specifically send Philip to help him (Acts 8:26-40).

If any of these matters were in our hands then God would be bowing down to us and submitting Himself to our authority. Coming to God is not a matter of compromise and negotiation but of an unconditional surrender.

Do you see the picture? In order to obtain the visa (the power to become a son of God) you must recognize (receive) the official who represents the king.

God's Authority in Action

The authority of God is expressed by the anointing. The word "Christ" means "anointed." Had the Jews been listening, Jesus told them on more than one occasion where his authority came from. In Luke 4:18-19, Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

He was in Nazareth where he had grown up. He was in the synagogue reading from the old testament, something he had obviously done many times before. Though he was the Son of God, yet his reading of the scriptures had never before provoked any unusual reaction. This time was

very different. Something had happened to him since the last time he had attended their synagogue.

For 30 years Jesus had been waiting on his Father for the time for his ministry to begin. He knew he needed God's Spirit to be with him if he were to accomplish the Father's purpose in sending him to earth. He had emptied himself and was a man, powerless to do the work of God in himself (Phil. 2:7-8, John 5:19, 30).

When the time came, God had an anointed servant in the earth named John the Baptist. Jesus came and submitted himself to God's authority expressed through John and was baptized. As he came up out of the water the anointing came upon him like a dove as the Father testified from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Mark 1:11.

Jesus was then led into the wilderness for 40 days of testing and trial during which he overcame physical weakness as well as the direct assault of the devil through temptation.

It was shortly after this that his visit to the synagogue in Nazareth took place. Although these people had known Jesus for most of his life and although he had read the scriptures many times before, this time there was a major difference — this time he spoke with divine authority. His words had such a powerful effect that these good religious people were ready to kill him (Lk. 4:28-29).

They fit the description in Isaiah 29:13 of people who drew near to God with their lips but whose hearts were far from Him. Words — even the scriptures themselves — had no real effect upon them. It took the anointing to expose the true condition of their hearts.

Heb. 4:12 says, "For the word of God is quick," (living) "and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

One thing Jesus said was most telling: "... he hath anointed me to preach the gospel ..." (Lk. 4:18). **I wonder why Jesus hadn't tried to preach the gospel before!** Think about it! In spite of the fact that he was the virgin-born Son of God and was both knowledgeable and sincere, he lived the life of an obscure carpenter till his baptism! I wonder why Jesus instructed the disciples to "tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." Luke 24:49. Could it be that the anointing is necessary in order to preach the gospel?

How Shall They Preach?

Hebrews 5:4 sets forth a principle of ministry: "And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron." Paul posed

the question, “And how shall they preach, except they be sent?” Rom. 10:15. Do you suppose that being sent by a denomination is the same thing as being sent by Christ?

There is a great difference between having Christ’s authority to do a thing and trying to do it without that authority. In Acts 19 there was a chief priest among the Jews names Sceva. He had seven sons who evidently had observed Paul’s authority over evil spirits through the Name of Jesus and thought they would use his method. Before the man with the evil spirit beat them up and chased them away the spirit said to them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?” Acts 19:15. It certainly wasn’t Paul’s method that enabled him to succeed. Devils recognize and fear those who have authority from Christ.

Men who undertake to preach the gospel without Christ’s anointing are no more effective than were the seven sons of Sceva. Their followers may appear religious but they are not citizens of God’s kingdom.

Back to the kingdom of Paradise. Suppose that, along with the handful of genuine officials able to grant visas, other men begin to think that it would be a good thing to recruit people to go to Paradise. They might even be sons and grandsons of men who have had real authority, yet they themselves have never been properly commissioned.

In process of time imagine that many groups arise each claiming to have a special arrangement with the King to grant visas. These groups develop conflicting ideas about Paradise and the proper procedure for going there. Nevertheless they zealously plunge ahead giving out official-looking documents right and left, competing with one another for followers.

It becomes very confusing for anyone desiring to go to Paradise. For every official giving out genuine visas, there are many more giving out counterfeited ones, yet, how does one tell the difference?

Do you see, at least in a small measure, where we are at in religion today? Many groups can point back to someone who was genuinely anointed of God. Yet, what they have today bears little resemblance to their beginning. What has happened is that men have learned the words and methods and have employed them without the anointing. The will and leadership of men — often inspired by religious spirits — have been substituted for the active practical leadership of Christ, the Head. Christ has been reduced to a mere figurehead with no real authority or influence over what is done in His Name. The only possible result is Babylon — confusion. Such religious “houses” wind up the same way the Jews’ did — desolate.

Prophesying in Part

There is a principle that seems to be overlooked by almost everyone. In I Cor. 13:9 Paul said, "... we prophesy in part." There are two reasons for this. One is expressed in Prov. 4:18, "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." In other words, the revelation of truth is progressive.

Just because we have the Bible doesn't mean we have all the truth at our disposal. The truth contained in the written word must be "opened" or revealed by Christ if we are to understand it and benefit. All the study in the world will not take the place of Christ opening the book and ministering living anointed truth suited to the time and need.

Daniel, as great a man of God as he was, was told to shut up the words and seal the book till the time of the end. Daniel 12:4.

The ministry many look back to didn't have all of the truth. In the first place it wasn't time for some things to be revealed. In the second place only Christ has the authority to "open the book" (Rev. 5:1-5) and His use of that authority is governed by the time and by the particular ministry in question. Not every ministry is the same. This is the second reason why we "prophesy in part."

There may be a particular need in a certain place and a certain time. Christ may send a particular ministry with a special anointing to meet that need. They may give out some things they receive from Christ by revelation pertinent to the need, yet give out other things received by tradition. Whole denominations have sprung from the partial understanding of a genuine ministry from Christ.

In time all that is left of the genuine truth that was revealed is nothing more than a shell, devoid of life and power. What really holds sway is a great mountain of tradition that arises. Satan has nothing to fear from such religion. In truth it serves his purposes quite well. Multitudes of its followers are deluded that they have a "visa to Paradise" when, in reality, they are bound for the lake of fire. At best there may be a tiny remnant of those who, by God's grace have genuinely encountered Christ in the anointing and have come to know Him.

Another thing that adds to the religious confusion is the multitude of independent souls who are deluded into thinking they have a direct line to the King and don't need anyone else. They gather such information as is available from books and personal contacts and experiences and throw it into a pot with their own ideas and desires and cook up their own private brand of religion.

Their belief that they are in personal contact with the King effectively keeps them from recognizing and receiving anyone the King has truly sent.

They draw up their own visa in accordance with what they believe are the King's instructions and desires.

In reality our world is filled with wicked spirits whose job it is to impersonate the King and delude souls who do not from their hearts desire to submit to the authority of the King and do things His way.

In this natural illustration it is easy to see how multitudes, including would-be officials, could turn up at the gate of Paradise expecting to gain entrance only to be turned away. Matt. 7:21-23.

Chapter 7

God's Invitation

There is one key truth that is not adequately conveyed by the illustration we have used thus far. Entrance to "Paradise" is by invitation only.

Just as God's authority is expressed in the anointing upon someone He has sent, the invitation, or call, to leave the world for God's Kingdom is extended by the same anointing to prepared hearts.

The first invitation of the Church age was issued by the mouth of Peter on the day of Pentecost. Peter, endued with power from on high (Lk. 24:49), gave bold testimony concerning the Christ whose death the Jews had so recently instigated.

In reality the invitation was precipitated by the hearers themselves, mightily convicted of their need. Their response was, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Acts 2:37.

There was no begging. There was no psychological manipulation. There was no, "Pretty please, won't you accept Jesus?" There was simply the living presence of Christ expressed in the anointing upon Peter and in the conviction deep in the hearts of the hearers. **There is no substitute for this.**

Although the word "faith" is not specifically mentioned in the passage it is the only adequate description of their response to Peter's anointed message. The effect produced went far beyond a mere mental agreement with the ideas Peter expressed: they were moved in their hearts to decisive and positive action. "Faith without works is dead." James 2:20.

It was the faith produced in them by means of God's Spirit using the living word that moved them to ask what they should do. Rom. 10:17. Peter's answer was to give them the appropriate way that their faith (given them by God — Eph. 2:8) should be expressed.

The first thing was to repent. Repentance is a total change of mind, will and direction. It involves a God-given sorrow for the way you have been going and a whole-hearted turning from it to serve Christ. It is not a matter of adding Jesus to your life: it is a matter of giving up your life in this world and all that that may entail in order to have Him. It is exactly as Jesus described in Matt. 13:45-46 concerning the merchant who sold all that he had in order to possess the pearl of great price.

Think of Paul who was brought by God to the place where he counted all the accomplishments and virtues of his life as a sincere, zealous religious man as manure in order to have Christ. Phil 3:4-14. Only a work of the Spirit of God can produce such a result.

Repentance is nothing less than a miracle of God's grace that produces a radical redirection of one's heart. It is totally unlike most religious conversion which merely dresses up the natural man in a robe of self-righteous religious profession while leaving his heart of hearts unchanged.

Baptism

The other thing Peter gave his hearers to do was to be baptized. Baptism was an outward public way to express both faith and repentance. It signified death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-4). They were thereby laying down their former lives in death in order to possess the life of Christ.

Baptism meant not only the end of their former lives and rising up to union with Christ: it also meant union with Christ's body, the church, partly in heaven, yes, but especially to those on earth who were joined to Christ and each other through the bond of a common Spirit. I Cor. 12:12-13. I Cor. 6:17.

Baptism is not an ordinance you can observe all by yourself. It involves submission to an authorized representative of Christ and His body. In reality, Christ Himself, by means of the Body He indwells, administers true baptism. He is the baptizer.

Approximately 3000 people that day experienced the things God had promised as a result of repentance and baptism: their sins were forgiven and they received the gift of the Holy Ghost. Acts 2:38. Truly, a nation was born in a day! Isaiah 66:8. Matt. 21:42-43. I Peter 2:9.

These 3000, and many more in the days following, were not merely added to "Jesus in the sky": they were added **to the church**. Acts 2:47. Consider the situation. When the church was launched, the Lord chose the occasion of a major Jewish feast, the feast of Pentecost. Jews who lived in many other nations were gathered in the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 2:6-11). The disciples, being good Jews, were likewise in the temple for the occasion (Luke 24:53).

The impact of the noisy and visible coming of the Spirit upon the disciples, the miracle of tongues and the gospel message itself was so great that the converts didn't even return home! The greatest and purest expression of the church the world has yet seen occurred during these days. Acts 2:44-47. In spite of the unusual circumstances God's love was so real that no one went without, either materially or spiritually.

The spiritual needs were met through the “Apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42). An apostle is a “sent one.” “Doctrine” simply means “teaching.” The Lord Jesus, having fulfilled His promise to return in Spirit form (John 14:18), continued to spiritually feed, teach, help and govern His people through those He had prepared and anointed. Their anointing and the consequent authority were widely recognized and respected. Acts 5:12-16.

The Call of God

Peter, on the day of Pentecost, referred to the promise as being “unto you, and unto your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” Acts 2:39. What we have been describing is the call of God and its results. No one enters the kingdom of God who is not called. Eph. 1:18, 4:1, Col. 3:15, Phil. 3:14, II Thess. 1:11, II Tim. 1:9, Heb. 3:1, I Cor. 1:2, 24-29.

The call of God to a human heart through the gospel is an invitation to embrace Christ and all that that involves. It is an invitation to turn your back on the world and become a citizen of heavenly kingdom. Col. 1:13. It means leaving your natural family for God’s family. Luke 14:26, Mark 3:31-35, Eph. 3:15.

One word describes both faith and repentance and their results: **surrender**. Coming to Christ is simply surrender. We surrender the rule of our own lives to His Lordship. We surrender family, friends, plans, ambitions and ideas, religious or otherwise. We surrender all self-effort to make ourselves acceptable to God. In short, our lives are no longer our own, to do with as we please, but they belong to Him, purchased by His own blood (I Cor. 6:19-20).

He becomes our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption (I Cor. 1:30). Everything required to perfectly fulfill the purpose for which we are called is provided for us in Christ. We are complete in Him (Col. 2:10). We can cooperate with His work, but we cannot add to it.

A common expression for conversion is “coming to Christ,” as in “so and so has come to Christ.” I fear that in our day this expression, as with so many others, has become so watered-down and varied in its usage as to be meaningless. In most cases what is referred to is merely a religious conversion that involves Christ in name only.

Preachers love to quote the last half of John 6:37 in their invitations: “... him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” Their sermons and invitations are skillfully designed to bring about “decisions.” People, moved in their emotions, are encouraged — and sometimes tricked — to “walk the aisle,” and to “accept Jesus.” They are then told they are saved.

The emphasis is so much upon man that one would think that it is within any sinner's power to come to Christ. When it comes to "soul-winning" and gospel outreach, people are told that if they don't do their part — as defined by the one doing the telling — people will go to hell as a result of their failure.

This is a monstrous lie. I recently saw part of a religious broadcast where contributions were being solicited for its support. The fund-raiser came right out and told listeners that if they didn't respond, while they themselves might go to heaven, thousands of others would be lost and go to hell as a result!

What about the first half of John 6:37? It says, "**All** that the Father giveth me **shall come** to me." Verse 39 says, "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of **all** which he hath given me **I should lose nothing**, but should raise it up again at the last day."

Salvation is God's business. Every one He gives the Son will come. None of those will be turned away or lost.

Consider verse 44: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day."

Not only will every one the Father draws come and be received, no one **can** come unless He does draw them! Are we dependent on the sovereign grace of God or not!

Raising the Dead

Consider the sinner's position. He is dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 1:2). He does not understand or seek God (Rom. 3:11). He does not even fear God (Rom. 3:18). He is an enemy of God in his mind by wicked works (Col. 1:21). These characteristics apply equally to non-religious and religious sinners. The condition of the latter is simply covered over by outward religion. Matt. 23:25-28.

Salvation is nothing short of raising the dead — those spiritually dead to God and His kingdom. The sinner is God's enemy **in his mind**. All of his supposed knowledge and ideas are contrary to the knowledge of God. In truth, he knows nothing about God.

Salvation is not only not by the will of the flesh or the will of man (John 1:13), it is directly contrary to man's natural will. Left to himself, man would reject God every time.

A man must be arrested and conquered if he is to be saved. Phil. 3:12. No mere sermon, however eloquent, can accomplish that (I Cor. 2:4-5). No psychological manipulation to get decisions will produce sons of God. Only God's power can take a hell-bound sinner, conquer his will, change his mind, and raise him from the dead to life eternal.

And God's power is not something at our disposal to use as we will. It rests upon vessels of His choosing and even they must learn to move in God and act as He acts.

God moved upon Abraham, a chosen vessel, and miraculously brought forth Isaac, the son of promise, a type of God's elect. Rom. 9:6-9. Yet this same Abraham moved in himself to bring forth Ishmael who could never inherit the promise. Gal. 4:22-31. Only those that God miraculously brings forth through the anointed word and by an arresting conviction in their hearts can be saved.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11) is a perfect picture of the salvation of a sinner. Lazarus had been dead and buried for four days. He was certainly beyond any possible human help. He was as unaware of the natural world as is the sinner of the reality of God's kingdom.

The vessel used of God to speak the word of life was His own Son who had become man (Phil. 2:6-8). Jesus knew how to perfectly cooperate and yield Himself to the Father to carry out His will. He could minister to multitudes or He could go to the pool at Bethesda and heal just one man out of hundreds in need. John 5:1-9. He had learned to wait on the Father and do only what He was shown to do. John 5:19-20.

Jesus was equipped in accordance with His calling. He had the Spirit without measure and was therefore able to the same degree to speak the words of God. John 3:34. The words He spoke were spirit and life. John 6:63.

Jesus moved in perfect harmony with the will of the Father in delaying his journey to Bethany. It is evident that the Father had already revealed what was to take place (John 11:11) and Jesus thus was able to act in faith to accomplish His Father's will.

Jesus, Himself full of faith, encouraged faith in an unbelieving Martha (vs. 40), setting forth an important spiritual principle: "... if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God ..."

What took place on that day glorified God. There was no other motive involved. It resulted in a belief in many (verse 45). However, in order for God's glory to be revealed in the first place, **someone must exercise God-given faith beforehand**. Thus, although there are vessels involved in giving expression to the faith of God, the initiative is God's from beginning to end.

This is true in salvation. Isaiah 66:8 prophesied of the day of Pentecost when a nation was born at once and when "as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children." While God is sovereign in the matter of salvation, He nonetheless chooses to involve the faith of others. This is because the sinner himself is as helpless as is a natural baby when he is born.

It is the mother who puts forth the effort. And even she does not control the time. She merely cooperates with the process of nature.

When the time came for Lazarus to be raised, Jesus spoke only three words: “Lazarus, come forth.” When one is moving in harmony with God a lot of words are not required.

Two things in particular need to be noted. The first is that Jesus’ words were personal, directed to a particular individual. He didn’t go to the cemetery and issue a general call to see how many people would come forth.

Even though the gospel may in fact be preached in a general setting, yet the unseen activity of the Holy Spirit is to call forth sinners by name. God always works to fulfill His will and plan and to call every one of His elect at their appointed time. His word is focussed on the accomplishing of His work. Isaiah 55:10-11.

The second thing to note is that Jesus’ words were not a request, but a command. He did not beg or plead with Lazarus. Lazarus’ will had nothing to do with it. He was dead.

Man’s Will

The issue of man’s will is a confusing one. There are many in religion who emphasize the idea that man has a free will. It is as though a man is free to evaluate what Jesus and the devil each has to offer, to consider the matter, and then, when he’s good and ready, to choose one or the other.

This is a doctrine of devils (I Tim. 4:1). Man’s will is not free: it is bound by sin. Rom. 7:19-21. The choice presented is a phony one. It is a choice between the devil in the world and the devil in religion. It presents “another Jesus” (II Cor. 11:4), a false Jesus who comes as a kind of salesman trying to sell men on adopting some brand of religion that will make them acceptable to God.

It is true that men exercise their natural wills in earthly matters but this takes place entirely within the earthly realm. It has nothing whatever to do with God’s kingdom which is another realm altogether.

Consider Nicodemus (John 3). He was a sincere adherent of a religion that held the scriptures in high regard. And he was more than a mere follower: he was a “master” (verse 10) or a “teacher.” It was his place to instruct others about God. Yet when Jesus began to speak of being born again — or, more literally, born from above — it became quickly obvious that Nicodemus was totally ignorant. All of his “knowledge” was confined to this earthly, flesh realm. He knew nothing of the spirit, of “heavenly things” (verse 12). His “knowledge” came from man and not God.

Jesus said (verse 6), “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” The first birth brings forth men with natural life totally confined to a realm ruled

by sin and death. The natural man neither possesses knowledge beyond this realm, nor can he through his own power gain such knowledge. And even if he could somehow gain this knowledge his will is powerless to act. He is dead! Dead to God and dead to God's kingdom.

He is like a blind man confined to a room without windows and doors. To him, the room is all there is. He gains such "knowledge" as he possesses by groping in the darkness and learning from other gropers. Each blind groper forms his own perceptions and ideas about what is true and tends to be drawn to those whose ideas are similar to his own. Under such conditions it is not surprising that the many ideas that arise are at considerable variance with each other. The inhabitants of this "room" possess a nature that loves what God hates and hates what God loves. They are as addicted to sin as is an alcoholic who is helpless before the bottle — even more so. The alcoholic may learn to live without the bottle but no sinner can escape the power of sin on his own. Sin may take many forms and may be relatively concealed from the eyes of men, but it rules nevertheless.

Add to this the fact that also confined to this room are an innumerable horde of wicked spirits whose job it is to deceive the blind human inhabitants and you have a pretty hopeless picture — hopeless, that is, without Divine intervention. This is the realm into which all men, including you and me, are born as a result of the first birth.

The new birth is a birth "from above." Even as natural babies have no control over the birth process, so it is with the birth from above. When the Heavenly Father, the Father of spirits (Heb. 12:9), begets children, He does not fail in the attempt. He is not held hostage by the corrupted will of man. All that the Father gives will come (John 6:37).

God's Will

James 1:18 sums this up nicely: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures."

God does the begetting. This action is based, not on our will, not on our merit, not on our effort, but on "**his own will.**" Jesus told his disciples, "ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." Paul in II Thess. 2:13 said, "... God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."

God did His choosing long before we arrived on the scene. He "knew" His own before the world began (I Peter 1:2, II Tim. 1:9). This "knowing" of His own is far more than mere intellectual awareness that certain people would be born. He certainly was aware of everyone that would ever be born and knew them in that sense. Yet Jesus will say to many on that day, "... I never knew you." (Matt. 7:23)

Do you really suppose that Jesus is unaware of the very existence of these people? Of course not! Being known of God conveys the idea of a choice on God's part, of a relationship He has with those He "knows" that sets them apart from those He does not know. II Tim. 2:19 says, "... the Lord knoweth them that are His." This is the seal of the foundation of God! This is the foundation men need — especially in this hour.

The result of God's begetting is "... that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation ..." (II Cor. 5:17).

What God is doing is bringing forth a new creation that will replace this old corrupted one. The first stage of this, following the resurrection of His Son (I Cor. 15:23), is to bring forth sons of an incorruptible seed with an incorruptible life (I Pet. 1:23) capable of taking their place in the new creation free from the power of sin and death!

Just as the first creation was brought forth by God's will, so it is with the new one. (Heb. 11:3, II Pet. 3:5). God begets sons "with the word of truth." Lest there be any doubt, Peter identifies this word: "But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." I Peter 1:25.

When God brought forth the first creation He committed His word to His Son. His Son uttered the actual words involved, such as, "Let there be light." Gen. 1:3, John 1:1-3, Heb. 1:2, Col. 1:16-17.

The Word of God

The word of God is, by its very nature, quick (or living) and powerful (Heb. 4:12). All of the power needed to bring forth everything that we can see in this present creation was contained in the words themselves. It is by the same word, given through chosen ministers, that sons are begotten today.

That is what is missing in religion. **God is not the present tense author of the word being preached.** Would Lazarus have come forth had someone of their own will and without God's Spirit uttered the command? Of course not!

There is no special magic in the mere words, "Lazarus, come forth." Neither is there any magic in the scriptures. Though the Bible is the **written** Word of God, it has no self-contained power to raise the spiritually dead to eternal life. If it did, any old reprobate could bring forth children of God by merely reading it aloud to others! Children of God can only come forth when God is present and actively breathing His own life into the word being preached.

The scriptures plainly tell us that salvation is by grace. Eph. 2:8-9, Rom. 3:24. Grace is favor shown, not because the recipient has earned it or deserves it in anyway, but because the Giver chooses to give it. However, it is more than a mere description of God's attitude toward us. It is a force, a kind of Divine energy, that acts upon our hearts.

Grace opens spiritually blinded eyes to the realm beyond this "room." It confronts and conquers the "strong man" (Mark 3:27), the adamic nature energized by Satan. It energizes the will to respond to the gospel.

The choice on the part of the sinner is the choice of one who is surprised and cornered by an overwhelmingly superior adversary — surrender! When the time comes for a particular son to be born, God is able, by His Spirit, to so work with his heart that he will come forth, as did Lazarus.

The gospel is the "power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 1:16). It is God's command, compelling and directed to particular sinners, to cast away all religious self-effort to be righteous, to give up their life, to surrender at the feet of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, henceforth to belong to Him and to His body.

Men certainly must believe but an emphasis upon that fact that does not reckon on the sovereign grace of God is worse than putting the cart before the horse — **it is a cart without a horse!** Luke records the results of the ministry of Paul and Barnabas at Antioch in Acts 13:48. Note that he didn't say that they had so many "decisions" or "professions of faith." He simply said, "... as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."

Cut that out of your Bible if you want to but unless we act as an extension and an expression of God's will and power in what we do, however outwardly impressive it may be, our effort is totally wasted.

Religious Rebels

Jesus referred in Matt. 7:23 to the religious work of many as "iniquity." The Greek word there means "lawlessness." Someone who is lawless does as he pleases without regard to constituted authority. He is a rebel. A religious rebel is one who does not act under the direction and leadership of Christ. Christ is not the author of his work.

Religious rebels use Christ's name to lend credence to their work and to deceive many naive undiscerning souls into supporting them and their great plans. They are like someone who sets out to be a soldier yet never joins the army or submits to its leadership. Still, claiming, and even believing, that they have a special commission from the top general, they gather supporters as they are able — and some are very able — and rush about with much effort supposedly carrying out the plans of the general.

Either Christ is very, very confused or most religious workers are zealously charging about, motivated by something other than the will of Christ. It's very easy to say, "Amen," and believe that this applies to others. However, at best, even God's true elect have been influenced and corrupted in varying degrees by religion. God is in this hour bringing forth such truth as is needed to dispel religious darkness and to prepare His remnant church for Christ's coming and the end of the age.

Chapter 8

Can You Recognize the Anointing?

We have put much emphasis upon the necessity of God's anointing as an expression both of His authority to preach the gospel and of the actual power of the gospel necessary to impart God's life to dead sinners. Most people, unfortunately, have little or no idea what the anointing is or how to recognize it. That being the case, it is easy for the devil to raise up ministers (II Cor. 11:13-15) to deceive them.

The devil works in those he would deceive to fill them with ideas about God and about how to identify His ministers. At the same time he raises up ministers who fit the picture he has created.

For some, Satan associates God in people's minds with a very dignified religious atmosphere filled with many outward symbols, special clothing, and much ritual and ceremony. For a minister to succeed in this setting he must be well educated, particularly in psychology. He must learn to manifest a smooth dignity that lends itself to the expected religious style that reinforces the belief of his hearers that they are serving God by keeping their religious machinery grinding away and doing "good works."

Satan has trained others to associate God with certain emotions and even bodily sensations. Their ministers must be skilled both in manifesting and in evoking in others the appropriate feelings. Through the proper combination of music, words, and emotion, large crowds may be "worked up" into a religious fervor that they believe indicates God's presence.

This same principle of religious belief and expectation coupled with ministry that suits the particular beliefs can be observed in virtually all of the varieties of "Christian" religion. In some cases what we are observing is the dead outward form of something that at one time actually had a measure of real life. Those who so fervently preserve and promote the form are unaware that "the glory is departed." I Sam. 4:21, II Tim. 3:5.

Many folks have come to associate God with a certain style of speech. One example is the speaker who pours out a torrent of words at a fever pitch punctuated by gasps. This is supposed to be the Holy Ghost giving him the words so fast he can hardly get them out. This is nonsense. It is simply a style that has been learned and handed down in ignorance. People who believe in it are held captive, afraid to question.

Can you imagine Jesus teaching on a hillside carrying on in such a manner? On at least one occasion, Jesus taught the people from a boat beside the shores of Galilee. If Jesus had preached in the manner many today have come to associate with the Holy Ghost — feverish words, strong emotions and physical demonstration — it surely would have been one of the great miracles of His ministry that the boat didn't tip over!

How many times have we observed someone's personality change when they stand behind a pulpit? The carnal become sanctimonious with a phony-sounding religious tone of voice. The timid become extremely bold. The anointing does not change a man's personality!

Jesus didn't put on a phony religious voice when he spoke. Paul didn't place any emphasis on "excellency of speech" (I Cor. 2:1). The anointing may or may not be present in words that are demonstrative and forceful or in words that are quiet and simple. The anointing is not linked with or restricted to any particular style. It is a spiritual quality — an added dimension — that only comes from God.

Of course, not every religious manifestation that goes beyond the natural ability of the man is God's anointing. There are plenty of demons in our world whose specialty is counterfeiting God's anointing. It requires God-given discernment to tell the difference.

Three Sources of Inspiration

Man, all by himself, has many natural abilities that may cause others to be impressed. We differ from one another and some have a natural charisma and leadership ability that enables them to lead and influence others.

When we observe someone who is successfully leading and influencing others religiously we need to be aware that there are three possible sources of inspiration. It could be just the man himself. It could be a demon. It could be God. Because of the power of darkness and our corrupted nature most hearers will gravitate to the first two and shy away from the latter. It takes a miracle for a man to recognize and hear God when He speaks.

It might be wondered: How many of each kind are there? When Jesus spoke of those who would come in his name and deceive, he used the word "many." Matt. 24:5. When he spoke of those who "work iniquity" in Matt. 7:21-23, he likewise said they were "many."

In Matt. 7:13-14, Jesus uses the word "many" in contrast with "few" when he speaks of the wide gate and the broad way and of the strait gate and the narrow way. This is in the same context as his words in verses 21-23. It is evident that there is a direct connection between those who are false prophets and work iniquity and those on the broad way. It is also very

evident that those on the broad way are greatly in the majority. I believe it is also evident that the false prophets are also a similar majority.

It is their religious efforts that result in the multitude on the broad way. The broad way is more than simply living in the world. It is a religious way. It is a way in which men believe they are acceptably serving God and heading for heaven. Unfortunately it is the invention of apostate religion and leads to destruction.

A true prophet is someone who speaks as a representative of God. A false prophet is not necessarily someone weird, way-out and obvious. It is someone who undertakes to lead and influence others religiously who has not been sent or equipped by God to do so. He may be sincere and zealous. But, as we pointed out earlier, sincerity is not enough.

Someone not sent of God, but fired with religious zeal, must, in the absence of the true anointing, rely upon substitutes. There are many that are easy to detect if one becomes used to the true anointing. Such things as zeal, enthusiasm, tear-jerking emotion, shouting, physical antics, humor, sanctimonious tone, scholarship, pet doctrines and sayings are but a few of the substitutes employed. Just because a minister feels and imparts a surge of emotion doesn't necessarily mean it's God. He may cry and move his hearers to tears, yet God be totally absent.

The thing is that all of these substitutes belong to the natural realm. Any of them can be easily reproduced by a skilled actor. No actor, however, can manufacture God's anointing.

The scriptures plainly warn against "spiritual counterfeiting," against trying to speak for God without being sent, and warns hearers that there are many who do just that.

The Israelites were given a special formula for a literal anointing oil to be used only as God directed (Exodus 30:22-38). Any who misused it or counterfeited it were to be cut off from the people. This is an obvious type and a warning to us today.

The anointing oil was specifically not to be poured upon man's flesh (Ex. 30:32). God's anointing is not for religious rebels — those who act outside of God's call, preparation and leadership. A vessel God would use must be broken and brought to a place of submission and separation.

God is not in the business of sanctifying and blessing the fleshly religious efforts of men. We cannot conceive and bring forth some religious work and expect God to come and bless it. We must learn to wait upon His leadership without being influenced by the religious activity around us. Religion craves visible success. We must wait upon Him for such results as He has purposed to give. Let religion build its mighty kingdoms. They will

soon be ashes. His work will endure forever. And He has promised to finish His work and cut it short in righteousness. Rom. 9:28.

In spite of the flood tide of religious confusion, God's voice is in the earth today. He speaks, as He did in Noah's day, a message of warning and of the need to prepare. There is more to being ready for Christ's coming than being "saved." I put that in quotation marks because most religious people are totally deceived as to what "being saved" really means. Noah was a man who found favor with God, but he still needed the ark. God gave very specific instruction and He alone has the knowledge we need to find a place of safety in today's rising flood of darkness.

I hope you are one who is a candidate for what God is saying and doing in this hour. Are you a part of the remnant able to be aroused and delivered from Babylonian captivity? I hope so!

Chapter 9

How Can We Know?

All that has been said thus far fairly screams the question: How do we tell the difference between those who are sent of God and those who represent religion? What yardstick can we use?

There is no human yardstick, no human barometer that will do. Yesterday's religion always blinds men to the present tense voice of God. Signs, wonders, experiences, feelings — these, too, are no gauge of anything. A strong emphasis on adhering to the letter of the word is insufficient as well. The Jews had that to no avail (John 5:39-40). Do you truly understand the scriptures? Whose interpretation is the right one? Scholars who've devoted a lifetime of study to the scriptures, delving into the Greek, the Hebrew and the Aramaic differ greatly as to its meaning.

The Key

Jesus Himself gives us the key in John 7:16-17: “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. **If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.**”

The true servant of God gives out truth, not handed down by religion, not dug out by human study and reasoning, but revealed to him by God. Of course, revealed truth is not something apart from the scriptures but is a proper understanding and application of them. Flee from any who claim they have gone beyond the Bible and beyond the church.

Revealed truth, however, will only be recognized and appreciated by a certain kind of hearer — the one whose will is surrendered to God, the one who desires God's will in his life above his own.

Our natural wills are totally contrary to God. Multitudes are blind and deaf to God because of “their” religion, “their” church, “their” ideas, “their” family, “their” interests, “their” lusts and desires, “their” plans and ambitions, “their” friends — in short — “their” life. They hold the reins of their own life and have no desire for anything that threatens that.

The very things men cling to in rejecting God are but chains that bind them to a world marked for destruction and make them easy prey for the devil and his demons. What men call liberty is the very thing that makes them slaves to sin and death. Only surrender to God brings freedom.

Abraham is a beautiful type. He was called to leave his family, friends and country for a land he had never seen. Gen. 12:1-3. I have no doubt he loved his family and friends and was happy and comfortable right where he was. Nevertheless when God's command — and promise — came he obeyed. His obedience was an act of faith in the One who had spoken.

In the course of time, Abraham was called upon numerous times to believe, or to place his trust in God, and God **counted Abraham's faith as righteousness**. Gen. 15:6. In reality, faith and obedience are all we can offer God. We certainly cannot produce any righteousness in ourselves that He will accept. Praise God! He has provided all we need in Christ!

The commitment of will necessary in order to know is not a halfway thing. It is a commitment to walk in that knowledge even as Abraham did. Anything less is unbelief. We cannot expect God to reveal Himself to us only to satisfy our curiosity. We cannot say, "Thank you for the interesting revelation of truth, God," and then go on unchanged to live our own lives. If that is your approach, I strongly question the source of any "revelation" you have supposedly received. There is no substitute for a will surrendered to do His will — **before we know what that will is!** That is faith!

It may seem strange to emphasize our wills after what we have said about God's sovereignty in salvation. However, God does not trample upon our wills. We are not puppets dancing on a string. God works with our wills. If He didn't we could never will to do His will.

God's sovereignty does not relieve us of our responsibility to repent and believe, to exercise our wills to cooperate with Him. In fact His sovereignty is what makes that possible!

I love the illustration I've heard Brother Thomas use on many occasions. He said that salvation is like a man who walks up to a door upon which there is a sign that reads, "Whosoever Will." The man responds, "That means me," and goes through the door. After passing through he turns and looks back and on the inside of the door are the words: "Chosen in him before the foundation of the world"!

The Promise

Jesus gave a wonderful promise in John 7:17 to one who wills to do his will. He said, "**he shall know.**" Know what? The issue was the **source** of the message. Was Jesus just expressing his own ideas or was he giving out God's message? That's the same issue we face today. Is the preaching we hear living water from above or is it something else — a clever substitute? The promise still applies! **We can know!**

How can we know? How does this knowledge come? The same way Peter knew that Jesus was the Christ — God's anointed. Matt. 16:16-17. It

was revealed to him by the Father. That truth has never changed. The only way we can recognize and distinguish those God sends is by revelation. This revelation is not some great experience or feeling. It is a God-given inward knowledge and conviction. It is hearing a man speak and having God witness to your heart, “This is My word.”

Are you a candidate? Is God and His will and truth more important to you personally than “your” church, “your” ideas, all the things enumerated above: “your” life? Are you willing to leave all and follow Him? Jesus said, “So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.” Luke 14:33.

You can know, but it will cost you your life. That seems a small price to pay, however when it dawns upon you that what you are asked to give up is something you can’t keep anyway! Jesus said, “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” Matt. 16:25.

Giving up your life is like a man who gives up a small leaky row boat, tossed about in a tempest with no destination and no hope, for a mighty ship on a sure course for a safe harbor. Christ Himself is the captain of that mighty ship! He has all the resources of heaven at his disposal to bring every one of God’s elect safely home!

Discipleship

The revelation of one to whom God has committed a true ministry of His word is but the first step. That is why Jesus said, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” John 8:31-32.

A disciple is a “learner.” The truth God would impart to us is not something that we can receive all at once. It is an ongoing process. It always involves a good deal of “unlearning” of things we thought we knew — especially for those exposed to much religion. This is where many stumble. Some aspect of their religion is so deeply rooted that they become unwilling to change. Though God mightily anoints someone with truth to help and deliver them from their religious captivity they simply cannot let go of their ideas.

Hosea 6:3 says, “Then shall we know, if we **follow on** to know the Lord ...” Following on is a process, not a passing fancy. It is a persistence that is not deterred from its course. It is the focus of one’s life. It is the unswerving pursuit of a worthy goal: “**Then shall we know.**”

Following on involves a continued recognition that we do not presently know all that God in His infinite love desires to share with us as we wait

upon His teaching. Yet we follow on in faith that God “is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Heb. 11:6.

“Seeking him” implies an effort put forth toward God. It means positive action in response to the promise: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you.” Matt. 7:7.

“Diligence” means never giving up. It means giving our seeking a priority over other things in our lives. It is an effort that is deadly serious and persistent rather than casual and occasional.

Paul gave up everything “for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.” Phil. 3:8. In verse 14 he said, “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

Of course, God’s calling involves a transformation from what we are to what He has purposed that we become: “conformed to the image of his Son.” Rom. 8:29. A growing knowledge of truth is a necessary ingredient in that transformation. How can we become a glorious church without spot, wrinkle or blemish apart from the washing of water **by the word**? Eph. 5:26-27. Where, in our present sea of religious confusion is the word that can accomplish that? It simply cannot be found in religion.

The voice of religion serves merely to preserve itself and to extend its influence. God has not forgotten His remnant, however. His voice is in the earth today to accomplish what He has promised. His faithfulness will prevail to finish the job in them that are His!

Chapter 10

No Private Religion

One thing needs special emphasis in this day of rampant individualism: the pursuit of truth cannot be accomplished all by yourself. God does not call men to a private religion — just them and Jesus.

On the day of Pentecost, Christ did not anoint his followers to go everywhere independently, each to start them a church as they saw fit, subject to no judgment but their own. He inhabited and empowered His body, the church. It is the spirit of antichrist that refuses to recognize the presence and authority of Christ in His body. I John 4:1-3.

The converts, “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Acts 2:42. Verse 44 tells us that “all that believed were together.”

Jesus prayed for all who would believe, “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” John 17:21.

The present confusion and disunity is the result of Satan working through the corrupted nature of men — a nature that is proud, strongly self-willed and independent. However, the principle behind the words spoken by Moses to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 12:8-9 still applies to God’s people today: “Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes. For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the Lord your God giveth you.”

They were further instructed that God would establish a place where His name would dwell and that that is where they were to go. That same God is still in business today, manifesting Himself in those rare places where He is in charge, where His authority is expressed and honored.

The Father has given all authority in heaven and earth to His Son (Matt. 28:18). He has given Him a name which is above every name and decreed that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. Phil. 2:9-11.

Most will bow too late to do them any good. Those who are His will bow here and learn to acknowledge His Lordship.

Gathered in His Name

In Matt. 18:15-20, Jesus described the authority of His church to bind and loose on earth. In matters of judgment, there is no higher court. Such authority is a result of verse 20: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

That is what the elect remnant desperately needs in this hour: to be gathered in His name where He is truly present and in charge. This gathering is not something we do; it is something Christ does by conferring His authority upon chosen vessels that His own should be brought together under His headship in a practical sense.

The result is a body of believers who enjoy an ongoing relationship one with another and with Him. The simplest and clearest expression of this is in Jesus’ own words in John 17:23: “**I in them, and thou in me**, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” Ponder these words!

That is the true nature of the Kingdom of God! God was in Christ (II Cor. 5:19). He was “the body of the Father,” if you will. The Father, who is an invisible spirit (John 4:24, Col. 1:15, John 1:18), walked and talked among men through Him.

The church is Christ’s body, not just in a mystical sense, but in a very practical one. The true ministry of Christ establishes His name, or authority, in a particular place and gathers His elect under that authority.

In I John 1:3, John wrote, “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

Do you see the pattern? The Father and Son had a perfect fellowship, or relationship. John had been brought into that and his desire was to bring others into it — to expand the family of those truly joined to God through His Son and by His Spirit.

That is what the Spirit of God does. Where God’s Spirit is there is light and life and cleansing and fellowship and also judgment.

A key phrase from John 17:21 says, “... that they also may be one in us ...” True spiritual unity with the Father and Son can only happen by the anointing through the process described above.

Gathered by Religion

Look around you. Did God’s Spirit gather what you see? Something did!

In every religious denomination or group or movement there is some inspiration behind it, some spirit that rules and is expressed. If it is not God’s

Spirit then it is what Paul warned of in II Cor. 11:4: “another Jesus,” “another spirit,” “another gospel.”

These other spirits are certainly not heaven-sent. We live in a day of great lying signs and wonders (Matt. 24:24). Feelings, experiences, manifestations may seem very, very real and convincing and yet be from demons.

Rev. 18:1-4 says, “And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.”

This is a picture of religion that, despite its appearance, has fallen under the dominion of demons. It holds men spiritually captive. Its only prospect is God’s judgment. God’s remnant is warned to flee.

You can know — if you love God more than your religion, more than your experience, more than “your knowledge,” more than your life.

Our Responsibility

Since we have God’s promise that we can know the responsibility is ours. We cannot blindly follow a blind leader into a ditch (Matt. 15:14) and on the judgment day blame the leader or blame God.

God sends “strong delusion” not to lead astray His own elect, but to ensnare those who “received not the love of the truth that they might be saved.” II Thess. 2:9-12.

Only sheep are able to hear the Shepherd’s voice (John 10:16; 26-29). The Shepherd knows where all of His sheep are and what condition they are in. At the appointed time He can speak where they can hear and know it is Him.

Every one called to the Kingdom of God is brought up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay whether they wish to admit it or not. Psalm 40:2. That pit may be one of gross sin but it also may be religious in nature. I believe the latter is far more horrible.

Religion fixes people where they feel no need of God. Jesus said, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Luke 5:32. It is easier for a prostitute to be saved than it is for a religious person. Matt. 21:31-32.

Most of the tiny remnant that constitutes God's elect are asleep. The virgins of Matt. 25, both wise and foolish, were asleep when the time came for the midnight cry. They were unaware of the hour and of the need to be awake and preparing for the bridegroom's return.

That message is going forth even now. The Lord is warning of the lateness of the hour, proclaiming the one true gospel of the grace of God, delivering His elect from religious prison houses (Is. 42:22), gathering them under the headship of Christ that the remnant church might stand as one — every member in their proper place — when Christ returns.

Chapter 11

As It Was in Noah's Day

Conditions similar to the present spiritual darkness existed in Noah's day. The great majority of mankind had spiritually reached the point of no return. God was not a factor in their lives. They did as they pleased, their minds and consciences hardened against any influence God might have had to turn them around. The only thing left to do was for God to preserve the righteous and to destroy the wicked.

His message for that generation was not revealed directly to any and everybody: God chose Noah. People either hearkened to Noah or they perished.

Seven people listened to God through Noah and shared in the building of an ark — of God's specific design — capable of preserving them and representatives of all the animals through a great flood that destroyed the rest.

Today the world faces destruction by fire. II Peter 3. We are rapidly approaching the same condition experienced in Noah's day, when those who are unjust and filthy and those who are righteous and holy will each, by the decree of God, remain in that condition. Rev. 22:11-12. Already, most men are untouchable by the gospel, their hearts and minds blind to its light. II Cor. 4:3-4.

Great winds of spiritual deception of every kind are blowing and will increase. Those who venture outside their prison house of tradition face a bewildering array of voices each crying, "This is the way; walk ye in it." Not only are there false doctrines, but false experiences, feelings, manifestations, in short, great lying signs and wonders.

Jesus warned of these days in Matt. 24:24: "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect."

The Lord showed us years ago that Satan is loose in this hour like never before. He has great wrath because he knows his time is short. (Rev. 12:12)

It has never been God's plan for His children to try to live independently of one another here. Especially is this so today.

Heb. 10:23-25 says, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of

ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and **so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.**”

Only God knew what Noah and his family needed to do. They labored together to fulfill God’s specific instructions. Suppose one of them had said, “I don’t need the rest of you; I can serve God perfectly well elsewhere by myself,” or, “I’m tired of listening to Noah; I’ll build my own boat.”

Suppose Shem had risen up to challenge Noah, God’s choice, as Korah, Dathan, Abiram and 250 princes of Israel challenged Moses and Aaron in Numbers 16.

God alone knows what we need to do and how and when. We will prosper only as we proceed His way and under His active leadership. Most religion seems to operate on the idea that they have God’s plan all worked out and written down in simple black and white like a guide book or an operating manual.

If you have a journey to make through extremely dangerous territory, there is quite a difference in trying to follow someone’s guide book or map and in having Christ walk with you as your present and active leader! This time is unique. No one has been this way before. How can we hope to walk alone with only the confusing voices of religion to guide us?

What should you do? What can you expect? As we have indicated previously, God desires a people separated unto Himself who turn to Him with all their heart seeking His will and leadership. Be forewarned, however, that when you in your heart take such a **stand** and set yourself to seek the Lord, come what may, you’d better be prepared to **withstand** as well.

The devil will never let any move toward the Lord go unchallenged. Is God’s Kingdom worth fighting for? If you don’t think so, you’d better quit now.

In Luke 16:16, Jesus said, “The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man **presseth** into it.” In Matt. 11:12 we find, “... the **violent** take it by **force.**”

Paul said, “I **press** toward the mark ...” Phil. 3:14. In I Tim. 6:12, he exhorted, “**Fight** the good fight of faith, **lay hold** on eternal life ...” Also read Eph. 6:10-18.

All of these scriptures and many others remind us that we live in enemy territory and can expect a fight if we serve God. However, as Paul said in I Cor. 15:57, “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Tribulation

Jesus said, "... In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." John 16:33.

Simply put, tribulation is "pressure." This pressure could be outward persecution and trouble; it could be a direct spiritual oppression coming against your mind; it could arise from the opposition of friends and loved ones; it could come from former religious associates.

If you want to stir up the devil, just dare to come to Christ "without the camp, bearing his reproach." Heb. 13:13. Don't be surprised or dismayed when opposition arises from those you thought loved God and were your friends.

Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Matt. 10:34-37.

Jesus spoke in Matt. 13 of several types of hearers of the word. One type received the word quickly with joy yet when tribulation came they were offended and "withered away." Matt. 13:5-6, 20-21. I've seen many come in among us over the years. A few have stuck, but most have gone their way. It seems that those who come quickly with great enthusiasm leave just as quickly when things don't suit them or measure up to their expectations.

Those who stick invariably have much to overcome and their coming requires much patience both to overcome obstacles that arise and at the same time to wait on God and to act according to His schedule.

We are creatures of impatience. When we determine that we ought to move in a certain direction we are most anxious to get on with it. We are prone to acting in haste and to being very impatient with obstacles and with those who don't see and understand the things that we ourselves have only recently embraced.

Haste, anxiety and panic are not attributes of faith! God is not in a hurry. He knows exactly what He is doing. We can rest our case in His faithful hands and know that He will lead and provide for us according to our need and His plan.

It is very much in order to pray, letting the Lord know daily that we desire to do His will, don't know what to do and that we are dependent on Him to help us. We can remind Him daily of His promises such as Prov. 3:5-6, Psalm 37:5, James 1:5-8.

The devil will do everything in his power to turn you aside from truly praying and waiting on God. If he cannot discourage you when God's answer is delayed then he will send you all kinds of false answers. He may give you "revelations," even backed up by "feelings," or he may send you someone he controls with seeming answers.

If you are slow to move and cautious, distrusting yourself and daily trusting in and looking to the Lord, He will be faithful to steer you safely through Satan's spiritual "minefields." If the answer is delayed do not be anxious (Phil. 4:6-7). God is on time. He knows all about you and will not be a minute late.

One thing He is doing is working in you that great spiritual quality called patience. James 1:2-4 says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

Patience is that expression of faith that enables us to wait on God, to endure in the face of adversity designed by Satan to get us to give up, to quit. The more we develop patience, the less Satan will be able to hinder us in serving God.

There is much false doctrine, (Matt 24:4) widely taught in our today concerning the end time in general and tribulation in particular. Every seeker of truth should prayerfully read the book, "*Lying Signs and Wonders*," which deals with end time deception.

As a result of popular teaching, most people think of tribulation as something future, after the church is removed from the earth. They are told of an evil world dictator who will specially focus his wrath on the natural Jew. Of course, we don't have to worry since we won't be here! So they say.

Apparently Jesus was mistaken when He said in Luke 17:28-30, "Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.

The picture here is of life going on normally, people totally unprepared, God removing His own (Lot) and total destruction immediately following. See I Thess. 5:2-3.

The Lord has shown us that **the tribulation Jesus warned of is here now** and we need to recognize it for what it is. No doubt it will get worse the closer we get to the end. As a result of the loosing of Satan and his increasing stranglehold on the world of lost mankind, serving God is like living in a spiritual "pressure cooker."

We need all the resources of heaven to stand. We need the living word of God that is given by the anointing; we need the fellowship of the body of Christ; and we need the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:10-18).

Chapter 12

Approaches to God

There are two approaches to a knowledge of God — both false — that men are naturally inclined to take. Both give ample ground for Satan to work to keep them under his power.

Paul, in I Cor. 1:22 said, “For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom.” In other words **some people have to feel their religion and others have to understand it.**

Both approaches are rooted in a spirit of unbelief that tries to sidestep faith, yet “... without faith it is impossible to please God ...” (Heb. 11:6).

Are you a “Greek” who has to understand everything intellectually? Are you a “Jew” who has to feel your religion in the realm of your senses?.

We don’t need the IQ of a genius or a graduate degree to know about God; nor do we need electricity running up and down our spines as a sign of God’s presence and favor. We simply need Christ, and to have Him we need someone Christ Himself has equipped and sent to reveal Him.

Jesus, in John 20:21 said, “... as the Father hath sent me even so send I you.” The Father sent the Son by being both IN and WITH Him. Christ sends His servants the same way. The life Jesus expressed — for those who had eyes to see — was that of the Father. John 14:6-11. The life Christ’s servants express is likewise that of the one who is both IN and WITH them. Luke 24:49, II Cor. 4:5-12.

Don’t look for perfection in God’s servants or in the body of Christ. After all, Paul said, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” II Cor. 4:7.

Jesus said that His kingdom was like a “treasure hid in a field” (Matt. 13:44). Christ Himself is the treasure. The field represents the humanity He indwells. The world passes the field by unaware of the treasure, but God will reveal the treasure to those who seek Him from the heart.

Note that the one who finds the treasure buys the field. The truth is you can’t have one without the other. To be one in spirit with Christ is to be one with His body — and vice versa.

Spiritual Rest

Multitudes today claim to be followers of Christ, yet have no real rest on the inside. Matt. 11:28-30. If they did they wouldn't be such easy prey for every spiritual wind that blows.

Only through the living word that Christ gives by the anointing can we find salvation rest, where we are able with God-given faith to surrender and completely trust in the finished work of the cross for the salvation of our souls. Anything less will leave you in a state of unrest, uncertainty, fearing failure, striving to "measure up" to some standard as though your salvation rested on your effort.

Only by that same living word will we find the growing practical rest that comes from "learning of Him." Learning of Dr. So-and-so or some religious tradition is a poor substitute.

Another poor substitute is trying to find spiritual rest through an experience. Experiences and feelings come and go. Satan loves people who seek and depend upon experiences. They are easy to deceive. When the feeling is gone, the unrest and need are still there. Many people crave religious feelings and experiences like the alcoholic craves the bottle. They are addicts with no spiritual anchor. Christ gives rest!

It is likely that someone I am writing to attaches much importance to some great experience you had perhaps years ago. Your spiritual life revolves around the memory of that. You spend a lot of time and effort trying to recapture what you felt back then. On the one hand you feel special because of what you experienced. On the other hand you live with the frustration and uncertainty caused by your inability to recapture and maintain it. You have no real inward rest.

This is a spiritual trap that holds many of God's people in great bondage.

Paul didn't live in the past. He learned to forget those things that were behind (Phil. 3:13).

Even if your experience was God-given, He never intended for you to walk by feeling but "by faith" (II Cor. 5:7).

There is, however, given the current state of affairs religiously speaking, the possibility that your experience was not God at all, but a device of the devil to hold you captive.

Can you surrender your past to God, trust Him with it, and seek Him that you might live in the present by faith?

Chapter 13

Growing in Knowledge

It is the inborn tendencies of our fallen nature that trip us up in our quest for a knowledge of God and make us vulnerable to the deception of the enemy. Failing to understand as we should the absolute authority of Christ and our utter dependence upon Him, we plunge ahead anyhow, trusting in our own abilities.

Our curiosity and rebellious independence drive us to intrude into areas of truth God may not be revealing and to reason out “answers” anyway. Deut. 29:29. We do just the opposite of God’s counsel in Prov. 3:5-6. We trust in ourselves; we lean to our own understanding; we pay “lip service” to acknowledging the Lord while we “bulldoze” our own paths.

Think of the great men of God who prophesied of the coming of Christ and the glory to follow. I Peter 1:10-12. One of the great trials of their faith was surrendering their many unanswered questions to the One Who had called them. Think of Daniel, who, in spite of his burning curiosity, was willing to “shut up the words and seal the book.” Daniel 12:4-9.

Time, Place and Manner

There are many things we will not understand this side of eternity. Faith calls upon us to rest in God’s wisdom and to not concern ourselves about things He chooses not to reveal. As to the rest, we are subject to His choice of time, place and manner. The walk of faith requires us to trust in our Heavenly Father and in His Son in these matters, confident of their faithfulness to give us such knowledge as we need.

Faith also requires that we recognize and receive those God specially calls to “labour in the word and doctrine.” I Tim. 5:17. It goes against our nature to recognize that we do not all have the same access to God in these matters but that is the case.

The body of Christ consists of many members, each unique in his call and place. I Cor. 12. The church will only reach her destiny as God calls and anoints apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, and as the rest of the body recognizes and submits to the Christ who is present among them by that anointing. Eph. 4:11-16.

In salvation, we all have exactly the same access to God through the blood of Christ and we receive exactly the same righteousness credited to

our account. Eph. 1:7, 2:13-18, II Cor. 5:21. Yet, in the function of the body, some, by virtue of their call, have an access to a revelation of truth others do not have. Of course, that access is not for their private enjoyment but is God's way of providing needed revelation for the body as a whole that all may benefit, even as our natural eyes and ears provide their special functions for the benefit of our bodies as a whole.

Learning the Hard Way

Moses' sister Miriam learned the hard way about differences in call and anointing. She imagined in her heart that because God had used her, there was no real difference between her and Moses. Her feelings surfaced when Moses married an Ethiopian woman. The Bible itself doesn't say whether it was right or wrong, but she was critical and took the opportunity to express her inward feelings and to speak against him. Numbers 12:1-2.

Of course, God heard it. Aaron had been brought into Miriam's rebellion but it is evident that she was the instigator. God called them before the tabernacle and made it very plain that Moses was indeed different from them and that He was angry with their presumption. In speaking against Moses, they were actually speaking against the God Who had called him and put him in the place he occupied. Numbers 12:4-9.

They repented, but that the lesson might be thoroughly learned, Miriam remained a leper outside the camp for seven days. The whole nation had to sit and wait till she was healed and brought back in. Numbers 12:10-12.

Amazingly, Korah, Dathan and Abiram and 250 princes of the assembly made the same mistake in Numbers 16! When they persisted in their challenge, God caused the earth to swallow up not only them, but their families and possessions as well.

God takes these matters seriously and so should we.

Of course, in our day, the challenge is in **identifying** those who are genuinely God's servants — very few — from the many who give expression to some other form of inspiration. As we have previously indicated, God is both able and willing to reveal His true servants to those whose hearts genuinely desire Him.

We need to be able to recognize those few called and anointed to be "fathers," those with a God-given vision of the family of God in the earth, with the spiritual ability to beget children of God, and with a disposition to bring together and to nurture His children through good times and bad. I Cor. 4:15. Phil. 1:3-11. God has promised to "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers" Mal. 4:6.

Learning of Him

It is not our Heavenly Father's desire that those who are genuinely His children should be scattered throughout the many divisions that prevail in professing Christianity, each contending for his own set of traditions. His heart is expressed in the words of His Son in Matt. 11:28-30, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Spiritual rest only begins as the true gospel of the grace of God is revealed to our hearts and we are enabled to place all of our trust in the work of Christ on the cross. Too many of God's children, however, know little of the practical rest that results from learning of Christ. He is the Teacher we need.

It is widely believed by professing Christians that all that is really necessary is that we "believe the essentials," meaning that we believe that the Bible is the word of God, that salvation is through personal faith in Christ, and so on. In other areas of doctrine, considered beyond the basics, it is believed that we are free to disagree, each embracing his own concept and understanding.

Is there not "... one Lord, one faith ..." (Eph. 4:5)? Did not Jesus pray that we might be one, that the world might believe that the Father had sent Him (John 17:20-21)? How is it that we have come to justify division? Where did this "wisdom" come from? Did it come from above? I think you know the answer!

All Revealed Truth Important

There are no non-essential doctrines. Every revealed truth is important to the spiritual well-being of God's children. Everything we truly learn of Him brings a measure of spiritual rest through understanding. It is light that dispels the lies and confusion spewed forth by the serpent to pervert our thinking about God.

Do you really suppose that God, seeing His children in need, would trouble Himself to reveal relevant truth, and not care that men ignore His loving wisdom to believe as they please? What He reveals is not one opinion among many to be embraced or discarded as we see fit. We don't need theological debate. We need the word of God.

When we don't know, we need to be willing to say with simple honesty, "I don't know." There is no shame in that. The shame lies in pretending we do know and coming up with "answers" anyway.

One of the afflictions of our unbelieving nature is the need to have a theological system that answers all the questions and fills in all of the

blanks. We like our religion set down “in black and white.” Trusting God with unanswered questions and saying, “I don’t know,” seems awfully scary and uncertain to an unbelieving heart.

We want a religion that can be learned by study and taught man-to-man, not one that must be **revealed**, God-to-man. If you prefer the former, take your pick: there are thousands to choose from! Which one is right? Or, make up your own!

The alternative is to seek God, believing He will faithfully answer our need according to His own infinite wisdom. Heb. 11:6. Do you see how most religion rests upon a foundation of unbelief?

Faith is not embracing and practicing a ready-made system; it is a pilgrim journey in which we walk with God and learn of His Son by revelation through the Word.

Personal Faith

Our Heavenly Father desires that His children have a personal faith and conviction, that they have a good conscience in what they believe. There is a measure of responsibility that rests upon the individual believer.

God has not left us to our own resources in exercising that responsibility. When Jesus spoke to His disciples of the coming of the Holy Spirit, He began, “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth....” John 16:13. It should be painfully obvious that a great variety of other spirits have guided most professing Christians into what they believe: if it were not so, they would agree!

In I John 2:26-27, John was teaching and warning concerning false teachers: “These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you, But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.”

Every truly born-again child of God has His Spirit on the inside. Gal. 4:6. Rom. 8:9, 11, 15-16. There is only one Spirit. Eph 4:4. Whether the scriptures refer to that Spirit as the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Christ, they are referring to the same indwelling Spirit.

Those not born of God (including those begotten of mere religion) lack the capacity to learn and understand the things of God. I Cor. 2:9-16. But in that passage, Paul says of believers, “But we have the mind of Christ.”

Growing Up

While true believers have the capacity to learn the things of God, they can be, and often are, very ignorant spiritually. A normal newborn baby has all five senses and a brain but their usefulness is very limited. He cannot see

clearly. His brain is not capable of mature reasoning or of correctly interpreting the signals which come from his undeveloped senses. He needs time, growth and exercise to gain the practical use of his inborn abilities.

That's just how it is in spiritual matters. Read Heb. 5:11-14 where the writer speaks of his difficulty in communicating deeper truth because his hearers were "babes" in terms of spiritual development. Verse 14 says, "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

Note: ability to tell the difference between what is good and what is evil only comes from exercise and spiritual maturity. Even Jesus, our Elder Brother, "**increased** in wisdom" as He grew up! Luke 2:52.

I John 2:27 almost sounds as though we don't need anybody else, that we are equipped to walk with God all by ourselves. That, of course, is nowhere near the truth. John is simply pointing out the fact that within the fellowship of believers, individual members, as well as the body as a whole, have God's Spirit to teach them.

It is by God's indwelling Spirit that we are enabled, as individual believers, to recognize the same Spirit in others. That is how we are able to "try the spirits" (I John 4:1). That is how we are able to "prove all things," and to "hold fast that which is good" (I Thess. 5:21).

This ability, as we have said, is one that must grow and develop. Just as God's order for babies is that they be born and raised in loving families that nurture and teach them, so it is in spiritual matters. The fellowship of those of like Spirit and the God-given abilities of those anointed to watch over the flock (I Peter 5:1-4) provide the individual believer a place of safety, where he can grow and his personal ability to rightly discern can develop within the context of the greater wisdom of the body as a whole.

As the scripture says, "... in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." Prov. 11:14. A principle honored throughout God's word is the need for two or three witnesses to establish a word. Deut. 19:15. Matt. 18:16.

God's Spirit in one of His children will cause them to desire the fellowship of others of like Spirit and to recognize that Christ **is** come in the flesh of His body the Church (I John 4:3). There is a perfect balance in God's plan between the measure of the gift of Christ given to individual members and the body as a whole. Eph. 4:7. Each needs the other. Properly joined together and to the Head, all may grow spiritually in an atmosphere of love. Eph. 4:16.

There is a great need for men who not only have this revelation, but who also have the call and anointing of God to bring it to pass. Eph. 4:11-13. In the meantime, believers can start where they are, desiring from their hearts to be taught of the Lord.

Whereas religious unbelievers must “feel” or “understand intellectually,” it is by the witness of God’s indwelling Spirit that we are enabled to find a rest of faith in truths we don’t fully understand or necessarily “feel.” That witness is one of inward peace. Col. 3:15 begins, “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts....” James 3:17 says, “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable....”

For example, it should be obvious to anyone following this series of articles that I believe strongly in the sovereignty of God. Why? I certainly don’t understand all of the mysteries involved. My flesh finds the truth distasteful and would prefer to take credit for some kind of self-effort. However, I’ve often heard anointed ministry on the subject and have had that confirmed repeatedly by God’s witness of peace to my heart that what I was hearing was His truth and not the mere ideas of a preacher.

I fellowship with other believers who have experienced the same thing and testified to it. Along the way have come precious nuggets of understanding that have increased my appreciation for this great truth. The more I learn, the more rest I experience. God has given me a personal faith in this area, yet I am not alone. I could testify to this in many other areas of truth as well. This is our Father’s desire for His children.

A Dangerous Time

It is undoubtedly the most dangerous time in history, spiritually speaking. To stick your head in the sand and to blindly say, “I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing” (Rev. 3:17), is folly.

Folks, we need the Lord. We need the ministry He has equipped. We need the body of Christ. We need this in order “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.”

Do not be hasty either to receive or to dismiss that which comes in the name of truth. Where you are uncertain, learn to look to the Lord and to wait on Him. “Putting it on the shelf” is often in order. The Lord is faithful to bear witness to that which is of Him.

That goes for what I have written. If, in the course of writing there are points I have made that, after your honest and prayerful consideration, God does not back up with a witness of peace, set those points aside. But be sure to hold fast that which is good. I Thess. 5:21. God holds each of us responsible for the truth He causes us to encounter.

Well, I've written far more than I set out to. If you have been challenged even a little to question and to examine and to seek God as never before then I'm thankful. If we know anything at all, it's by His grace!

What you do with what has been said is between you and God. "The ball is in your court."

I hope to see you on that day, if not before. May God bless you!