

God Had a Son
before Mary Did

The Significance of
God's Revelation of His Son



John David Clark, Sr.

I am indebted to many for their contributions to this work; that is, for their contributions to my life. Some have gone on to be with the Lord and cannot see this fruit of their labor. To those who are still here, I offer my sincere and humble thanks. Without them, this book would not be what it is, for I would not be who I am.

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Of those who played a part in shaping me, and so, this work, most important was “Preacher Clark”,¹ who was both my pastor and my father. He led me to Christ, “whose I am and whom I serve.” I am who I am because of him. And I am

your servant in Christ.

John David Clark, Sr.

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¹ George C. Clark (1901–1989). You can read of his life at PioneerTract.com.

Contents

Introduction

Part 1

“In the Beginning, the Word Was There”

Chapter 1: “He Was before I Was”	3
Chapter 2: God’s Kind of Life	25

Part 2

Concealing and Revealing

Chapter 3: “A Revealer of Secrets”	77
Chapter 4: The Son in the Old Testament	95
Chapter 5: Two Kinds of Righteousness	139
Chapter 6: “All Wisdom and Knowledge”	167
Chapter 7: The Son in the World	227
Chapter 8: The Revelation of the Father	323

Part 3

Life in the Father and the Son

Chapter 9: Government	343
Chapter 10: Life vs. Form	395

Appendix

Notes

- In English, the singular and plural forms of “you” are identical. However, in biblical Hebrew and Greek, the differences are obvious. Therefore, to more perfectly convey the biblical writers’ messages in verses where the word “you” appears, I have italicized the “y” of all plural forms, such as you, your, yours, yourselves.
- Translations of Old and New Testament scriptures are my own. Following standard practice, whenever a word is added to the translation for clarification, that word is italicized. Within the regular paragraphs of the book, however, italics are used only for emphasis.
- Conflicting rules exist as to how punctuation should be used, none of them being adequate for every situation. My Readers will find that I subscribe to a freer punctuation style. Of special note, I do not include within quotation marks any punctuation that is not a part of what is quoted. To do otherwise, in my opinion, leaves too much room for misrepresentation of the original author’s intent.
- The subject of this book being what it is, a few references are necessarily made to “the Holy Trinity” and to the doctrine called “Oneness”, but my purpose is not to debate doctrinal issues; it is only to declare the meaning of the revelation of God’s once-hidden Son.

Preface

In 2007, I became acquainted with a group of sincere believers who taught that, other than in the mind of God, the Son of God did not exist until the birth of Jesus. They rejected the notion that in the beginning, the Son of God existed as a person alongside the Father. Inasmuch as the Bible exhorts us to “prove all things”, I carefully considered their teaching. I read a couple of their books and even traveled with some friends to visit a leading proponent of that doctrine. We all came to love that brother and his wife, and we still honor them as we honor everyone who believes in Christ Jesus our Lord. Unfortunately, I could not make their doctrine agree with the Bible’s teaching concerning the Father and the Son, for I could not deny the Bible’s clear teaching that from the beginning, the Son of God existed with the Father in heaven as a fully rational being. Nevertheless, I still “rejoice in hope” that God will someday bring us and all His people together in “the unity of the faith”.

My brief association with that group of believers prompted me to conduct a Bible study with my congregation on the subject of the Father and the Son. This book is the result of that study.

Introduction

Three truths provide the foundation for everything revealed about God and received from Him in this New Testament, and when understood, they reshape our perception of even the most familiar Bible stories. The first is that all divine wisdom and knowledge is hidden in God's Son (Col. 2:3), which explains why it is that no one can know God without knowing His Son. The second is that from the beginning of creation, God kept His Son hidden from all creatures, both in heaven and on earth. No one anywhere knew that God was a Father before the Son was revealed. The third is that even Jesus' disciples did not understand him until God enabled them to know him by sharing with them His kind of life, the holy Spirit, on the day of Pentecost. Only the Son possessed God's kind of life until Pentecost morning, and it was only after the disciples received that life that they began to understand who he was and the things he had told them.

By these three truths, the Old Testament is given new meaning, or rather, its true meaning is fully revealed, for we see in every page the Father declaring His Son, and yet hiding him at the same time. Many puzzling Old Testament prophecies become easy to understand when we realize that in them, both the Father and His hidden Son were speaking, sometimes to one another during the same prophecy, and at other times about one another or about future events.

The revelation of the Son was, at the same time, the revelation of God as He really is. The knowledge of the Son's existence told us, first of all, that God is a God of relationships. Then, the Son's life among us proved that God's thoughts and ways are not human and that, as Paul would later teach (Rom. 8:8–9), we cannot please God without possessing His kind of life because with nothing but our kind of life, we cannot do things His way. Those whom God sends with that message, being visible representatives of God's invisible thoughts and ways, are as loved or as hated as He is.

These truths compel us to ask some important questions, such as these: If all wisdom and knowledge was hidden in the Son until Pentecost, then did Old Testament saints, including Jesus' disciples while he was with them, not know what was good and what was evil? If heavenly beings as well as humans did not know the Son, then who did Satan think Jesus was? If every religious institution of man is contrary to the thoughts and ways of God, then what about the religious institution of Christianity? We will answer these and other such questions.

At times while this book was being written, God blessed my congregation and me with experiences that expanded our study of the Father and the Son far beyond what we had planned. My hope is that you will experience the power and light with which we were blessed as we grew in the knowledge of this astonishing revelation: God had a Son with Him in heaven long before Mary gave birth to her son in Bethlehem.

Part 1

“In the Beginning,
the Word Was There”



Chapter 1

“He Was before I Was”

In the beginning, the Word was there,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
John 1:1–2

THE BEGINNING AND THE END

The truth that John was attempting to convey in the opening lines of his Gospel is also the essential point of this book, and of the gospel itself; namely that *God had a Son with Him in glory from before the beginning of the world*. For His own wise purposes, God kept the existence of His Son secret until “the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4). Then, when God’s appointed time came, His revealing of the Son became the foundation for a new and everlasting covenant between God and man.

We are all familiar with the lovely way John 1:1 is translated in the King James Version: “In the beginning was the Word”. That translation is accurate; however, it does not quite communicate the revelation John was declaring. Literally, the Greek text says, “In the beginning, the Word was being”. Other possible translations include the following: “In the beginning, the Word existed”, or even, “In the beginning, the Word already was”. John’s point was that the Son existed before anything else did. The Son was not merely there at the beginning; he was there before the beginning began.

In the book of Revelation, the Son referred to his pre-existence with the Father when he said, “I *am* the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev. 22:13). He also told us what he was the beginning of, when he called himself “the beginning of the creation of God” (Rev. 3:14). In other words, the Son was “the first and the last, the beginning and the end” of the Father’s creative work, which means that the Father created the Son, and then the Son created everything else, just as John said: “Everything was created through him, and without him was nothing created that was created” (Jn. 1:3).

The following scriptures, written by New Testament men of God, proclaimed the astonishing and thrilling revelation that from the beginning, there had been a Son in heaven with God, a Son who had been God’s agent in creating all things:

Colossians 1

15. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.
16. For by him were all things created, things in the heavens and things on earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or rulers, or authorities. All things were created through him and for him,
17. and he is before all things, and all things are held together by him.

Hebrews 1

1. After God spoke in many and various ways to the fathers in olden times by the prophets, he spoke to us in these last days by a Son,
2. whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.

Hebrews 1 (quoting Pss. 45:6–7 and 102:25)

8. To the Son, *God said*, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of righteousness.
9. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore, God, *even your God*, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your fellows.”
10. And [still to the Son], “You, Lord, in the beginning, laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands.”

Throughout the New Testament, we are alerted when a writer’s meaning differs from what he appears to be saying (e.g., Mt. 24:15; 1Cor. 10:15; Gal. 4:24), but never did a New Testament writer alert his readers that he was speaking figuratively when he declared the Son’s pre-existence and creative work. They all spoke consistently of the Son as living in heaven with the Father from before the foundation of the world. Not once does any biblical writer veer from that simple, clear course. All of them would have agreed wholeheartedly with what John meant when he wrote, “In the beginning, the Word was there”.

“Us”

The Father and the Son are the “us” of Genesis 1:26, as well as of Genesis 3:22 and 11:7. In Genesis 1:26, when God said, “Let us make mankind in our image”, He was not speaking to angels. To create is not a function of angels; they are messengers only. In both Hebrew and Greek, the word for “angel” means “messenger”. Sometimes, “angel” refers to heavenly messengers, such as the messengers Jacob saw in a vision (Gen. 28:12) or Gabriel, who spoke to Daniel (Dan. 8:16; 9:21) and, centuries later, spoke to both Zacharias and Mary (Lk. 1:19, 26–27). But “angel” can also refer to human messengers, such as the servants that Jacob sent to meet his brother Esau (Gen. 32:3) or the two messengers that John the Baptist sent to Jesus (Lk. 7:19, 24), or even John the Baptist himself (Mt. 11:10). Whether heavenly or earthly, angels are simply messengers, and they are never said to have participated to any degree in the act of creation. The notion that it was to angels that God said “Let us make mankind”² is simply indefensible.

² Joel Hemphill, *To God Be the Glory: Examining the Bible View of God* (Joelton, TN: Trumpet Call Books, 2006), p. 43.

To create what God wanted created was the Son's function in creation. When the Father said, "Let us make mankind", He was speaking to His Son, who then created man according to God's expressed will. God had said, "Let us make", and so, the Son made.

"WHERE HE WAS BEFORE"

Every reasonable person who reads the Gospels will acknowledge that while on earth, the Son of God spoke as if he was fully aware of having been with the Father in glory before he came to live among us:

John 16

28. I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now, I am leaving the world and returning to the Father.

John 6

61. Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Does this offend you?"
62. Then, what if you should see the Son of man ascending to where he was before?"

Strict logic would lead us to conclude that if in the beginning, the Son was merely "the first creative thought in the mind of God",³ then, for him to "ascend to where he was before" would mean that when the Son ascended back to heaven, he returned into his Father's head! That is an absurd conclusion, of course, and nobody teaches such a thing. However, it is a conclusion which pure logic demands if the Son was only a thought in the mind of God before he came to earth.

Before returning to the Father, the Son prayed that He would restore to him the glory that he had before the world began:

John 17

- 1a. Jesus lifted his eyes toward heaven and said,
...
5. "Father, glorify me *to be* at your side with the glory that I used to have with you before the world existed."

"Before the world existed", the Son lived in happy, open glory with the Father (Prov. 8:22–31); it was only when rational beings were created that God hid him. The Son prayed for the glory he "used to have" because he knew it was time for him not to be hidden any longer, but if the Son had not lived in open glory previously, then this prayer to do so again would make no sense.

"SENT FROM"

During the time of the Old Testament kings, God sent Amos from a Judean village called Tekoah to the idolatrous sanctuary at Bethel to prophesy against the apostate northern tribes (Amos 1:1; 7:15). But the thing that made it possible for Amos to be sent *from* Tekoah was that he existed in Tekoah before he was sent. At another time, God sent Elijah from Gilgal to Bethel

³ Ibid., p. 43.

(2Kgs. 2:2), and again, it was possible for Elijah to be sent *from* Gilgal only because Elijah existed in Gilgal before God sent him. Neither Amos nor Elijah came into existence when they arrived in Bethel. So it was with the Son. He did not come into existence when he arrived on earth. He existed in heaven before he was sent to earth, and that made it possible for him to be sent *from* heaven.

Dozens of times in the Gospel of John alone, the Son of God testified that God had sent him from heaven, and even more specifically, that he had been sent “*down* from heaven” (e.g. Jn. 6:41). Nothing like that was ever said about any man sent by God, and no other man of God ever spoke of himself as being sent down from heaven the way Jesus did. Nor did any man of God, when his time came to die, claim that after his death he would be returning to heaven, where he was before. No man had such a testimony because no man had ever lived in heaven with the Father before the Father sent him. But the Son did. A primary reason that the Son was able to reveal the Father as no one else ever could (Jn. 1:18) is that before he came to earth, he had been with the Father since before the foundation of the world.

WHY THE SON IS THE GREATEST

When John the Baptist prophesied to the Jews that someone mightier than he was coming, he was speaking by the unction of the Spirit of God. He could not have known the meaning of his own words when he first saw Jesus and proclaimed, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!” (Jn. 1:29). John had no knowledge of the Son of God, much less of the Son’s future crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension into heaven to make an eternal sacrifice for the sins of the entire human race. Nor did John understand the prophetic words that came from his own lips when he said, “The one coming after me is higher than I, for he was before I was” (Jn. 1:15, 30).

In saying, “he was before I was”, John could not have been speaking of Mary’s son, for John’s mother bore John about six months before Mary bore Jesus (Lk. 1:26–36). If John had been speaking of his and Jesus’ physical age, John would have said, “I was before he was.” But because God’s Son existed first, John was moved by the Spirit to say the opposite, the same way the Spirit inspired all the prophets to speak mysteries concerning the hidden Son. And John was as ignorant of the meaning of his own words as those ancient prophets were of theirs (1Pet. 1:10–12). Even seeing Jesus face to face did not reveal to John the meaning of his words. All truth, Jesus said, would be revealed by the Spirit (Jn. 16:13), and the Spirit was not yet given (Jn. 7:39).

The central revelation of the New Testament is that God really is a Father and that He was a Father before the world began. This means that God had a Son a long, long time before Mary did. It also means that the Son is “Lord of all” (Acts 10:36) because he existed before everything and everybody (except, of course, the Father who created him). John had it right. The Messiah is the greatest of all creatures because he was the first of all creatures. Those who teach that God had a Son only when Mary gave birth to Jesus will admit that Satan existed before Jesus was born. That being so, and if John the Baptist’s standard for preeminence holds true (that is, whoever exists first is greater), then Satan would have to be considered greater than the Son of God, which is obviously not the case.

After the Spirit came, other men of God would proclaim that the Son is greatest of all because he existed before all, but unlike John and the old prophets, these men understood what they were saying. They wittingly taught what the prophets had ignorantly proclaimed:

Colossians 1

17. He is before all things, and all things are held together by him.
18. He is also the head of the body, the Assembly *of God*; he is the beginning, *the* firstborn from the dead, so that in everything he might be preeminent.

WHY THE SON IS *NOT* THE GREATEST

As has been mentioned, the Son of God declared himself to be the first of all that God created:

Revelation 3

14. To the messenger of the Assembly in Laodicea, write: “The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God, says these things.”

With that declaration, we are offered two bedrock truths of the New Testament. The first is that the Son of God was the first thing created. The second is that the Father is greater than the Son because He existed before the Son did. Both the Oneness and the Trinity doctrines contradict these truths. The former claims that the Father and the Son are one and the same being, and the latter claims that the Father and His Son are co-equal and co-eternal. But Jesus knew nothing of such doctrines. He said that his life had been given to him by the Father (Jn. 5:26), and he also said that the Father was greater than he (Jn. 14:28), and the gospel preached by the apostles took both those facts for granted.

Paul saw no problem at all in the Son falling down before the Father – something impossible for the Son to do if he were the same person as the Father, and something illogical for the Son to do if he were his Father’s equal:

1Corinthians 15 (referring to Ps. 8:6)

27. He [the Father] has subdued all things under his [the Son’s] feet. But when it says, “all things are subdued”, it is obvious that He who subdued all things under him is an exception.
28. And when all things are subdued under him, then shall the Son submit himself to Him who subdued all things under him, so that God might be all things to all people.

When the Son said, “The Father and I are one”⁴ (Jn. 10:30), he did not mean that they are the same person; he meant that they are in such harmony that nobody can have one without the other. Jesus also prayed that we who believe on him might be made one *as he and the Father are one* (Jn. 17:22), and obviously, we who believe in Jesus cannot become the same person. However,

⁴ Here, the Greek word for “one” is neuter, not masculine. This means that Jesus was not saying, “The Father and I are one *person*,” but “The Father and I are one *in spirit*.” The neuter “one” is also used in John 17:11, 21–22, where Jesus prayed for believers to become one the same way that he and the Father are one. When God is referred to as one *person* (e.g. Mt. 19:17; Gal. 3:20), a masculine form of “one” is used, not neuter.

we can be made one in spirit, as the Father and the Son are. We can be, as they are, “like-minded” (2Cor. 13:11), “perfectly united”, “speaking the same thing”, with “no divisions” among us (1Cor. 1:10), having the same love for one another (Phip. 2:2) as they do.

“WHY CALL ME GOOD?”

The unity of the Father and the Son does not imply equality of the Father with the Son any more than the unity of believers and Christ implies equality of believers with Christ. Christ is greater than believers, and the Father is greater than the Son. Jesus confessed that the Father was greater than he (Jn. 14:28), and he feared and obeyed his Father (Heb. 5:7; Jn. 15:10). He has been given “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Mt. 28:18), but the Father, who gave it to him, remains the one true God to whom the Son bows (1Cor. 15:28). When Hebrews says that the Son is the one “through whom He made the worlds” (Heb. 1:2), the “He” in that verse is the Father. The Son was God’s agent in creation, but the Father is the Creator, as Jesus himself said (Mk. 10:6; 13:19).⁵

When a certain young man excitedly greeted Jesus with the words, “Good master!” Jesus replied, “Why call me good? No one is good but One; *that is*, God” (Mt. 19:17). Jesus trusted in the righteousness of God alone and put no confidence in human righteousness, including his own. Though the Son is the greatest of all creatures and Lord over all creation, he considers himself to be but a servant of the Father (Isa. 49:4–5), and that is in accord with the Father’s frequent reference to the Son as His servant (e.g., Isa. 42:1; 49:1–3, 6). When the Son came to live among us, he still possessed the power with which he was created. At his word, raging storms instantly became calm (Mk. 4:37–39) and the dead were brought back to life (e.g., Jn. 11:43–44). But the Son dignified his majesty and power by being faithful to the One who gave him that majesty and power. He loved and revered his Father, and he always did what pleased Him (Heb. 5:7; Jn. 8:29), completely without sin (Heb. 4:15).

At the same time, the Son keenly felt the foolishness and sinfulness of the fleshly nature he had taken on. Psalm 69 is quoted twice in the New Testament as a prophecy of the sinless Son of God (Jn. 2:17; Rom. 15:3), and yet, within that psalm, we hear the Son crying out, “O God, you know my foolishness, and my trespasses are not hidden from you” (Ps. 69:5). We would not expect such a confession from the holy Son of God because we know that he was not foolish and that he “committed no sin” (1Pet. 2:22). But part of the Son’s becoming one of us is that he experienced the shame of the foolishness and sinfulness of our fallen nature.

The same kind of confession from the sinless Lamb of God is found in Psalm 41:9. At the Last Supper, the Son of God quoted what he had spoken through David in that psalm a thousand years before, explaining that it was a prophecy of his betrayal (Jn. 13:18b). Yet, in another verse from the same psalm, we hear the Son pleading with God, “Be merciful to me! Heal my soul, for I have sinned against you” (Ps. 41:4).

⁵ The one who commands an act to be performed is the one responsible for it. For example, Solomon is said to have offered burnt offerings (2Chron. 1:6), but only God’s priests could do that (Num. 4:5–15). The priests were the people’s agents for making sacrifice, but those who brought the sacrifice were given credit for having made it. Just so, the Father commanded the Son to create all things, and He is credited with it, even though the Son did the actual work.

Our natural response to this is to ask, “How could this prayer have belonged to the sinless Son of God?” The only reasonable answer is that the Son of God really did become one of us. He really did take on the corrupt nature of man, and he really was “tempted in every way that we are” (Heb. 4:15). He really felt the desperate sinfulness of the fleshly nature that he took on, and he earnestly prayed for deliverance from its power. For the Son to feel the shame of our sinfulness and to cry out to God for mercy was only a consequence of his taking on himself a fleshly body with its desperately sinful nature. When God made His Son, “who knew no sin, *to be sin for us*” (2Cor. 5:21), the awful feelings of guilt and shame came with it.

HIS OWN THOUGHTS IN HEAVEN

The verses below, from Hebrews 2, reveal thoughts, words, and deeds that belonged to the Son *before he came to earth*. They show that the Word who was with God in the beginning was a thinking, feeling, speaking being who loved both his Father and us and who desired to heal the breach between us and the Father which our sins had caused, regardless of what it cost him personally. The author, quoting Old Testament scriptures, tells us that the Son, *while still in heaven*, thought on us with great affection and spoke of us to the Father:

Hebrews 2

11. Both he who sanctifies [the Son] and those who are sanctified [those who believe in the Son] are all of One [the Father], for which reason he [the Son] is not ashamed to call them brothers,
12. saying [in Psalm 22:22], “I [the Son] will declare your [the Father’s] name to my brothers. In the midst of the Assembly, I will sing you praise.”
- 13b. And again [in Isaiah 8:18], “Behold, I and the children whom GOD gave to me!”

The indispensable basis of the scriptures quoted here is that the Son was alive in heaven with the Father, with his own feelings and thoughts, *before he took on a human body*. In verses 12 and 13, above, the Son is the speaker, and his words communicate no embarrassment at the thought of one day having us as brothers and sisters because we all would be sanctified by the same Father (Jn. 10:36; Jude 1:1). Clearly, the Son in heaven was looking forward to that day – this day! – when others would be sons of God with him.

THE SON AND HIS EARTHLY TEMPLE

Hebrews 10

5. When coming into the world, he said, “You did not want sacrifice and offering, but a body you have prepared for me.”

This verse shows us that when the Son of God came into the world, he was aware that the Father had prepared an earthly body for him. That body became the “temple” in which the Son lived from the time he came to earth until that temple was crucified. Then, when his temple died, the Son, still very much alive, left it for a few days to go to the heart of the earth to preach to spirits imprisoned there (Mt. 12:40; 1Pet. 3:19). Three days later, he ascended from the heart of the earth, re-entered his crucified temple, and walked out of the tomb, just as he had said he would do:

John 2

19. Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”
20. Then said the Jews, “For forty-six years this temple was under construction, and you will raise it up in three days?”
21. But he spoke concerning the temple of his body.

The following prophecy from the book of Psalms, quoted in Hebrews, reveals that the Son was talking to the Father *as he was coming into the world*. This tells us that when the Son was leaving heaven, he was aware of what was taking place; otherwise, he could not have been talking to his Father about it. And not only was the Son, at that moment, cognizant of what he was doing, but he was also committed to his Father’s purpose for doing it:

Hebrews 10 (cp. Ps. 40:7–9a)

5. When coming into the world, he said, “You did not want sacrifice and offering, but a body you have prepared for me.
6. Whole burnt offerings, and such for sin, did not please you.
7. Then I said, ‘I go⁶ (in a scroll of a book it is written of me) to do your will, O God!’”

Since the Son was speaking of his purpose for leaving one place and going to another *as it was happening*, it is obvious that when he came to earth, he had full knowledge of where he had come from and where he was going. Just the fact that the Son of God knew anything at that moment tells us something significant about him, for if *when he came*, the Son knew that he was coming, and if *when he came*, he knew his Father’s purpose for sending him, then *when he came*, he was already a living being with a mind of his own. And if he had a mind, then he was much more than a mere thought within the mind of God.

In the prophecy from Psalm 40, just quoted by the author of Hebrews, the Son added this: “I delight to do your will, O my God! Yes, your law is within my heart” (Ps. 40:8).

So, *as he was entering into the world*, the Son was joyfully determined to do the Father’s will because love for God’s law was already in his heart. And if that simple statement is true, then the Son already had a heart as well as a mind when he left heaven; otherwise, there would have been no heart in the Son into which God could have put that love for His law.

Love for the Father and doing His will consumed the Son when he was on his way to earth because it had always consumed him, and it continued to consume him after he was sent to earth (Ps. 69:9a; fulfilled in Jn. 2:13–17). There has never been a moment when the Son was lukewarm about pleasing the Father. To do the Father’s will was so important to the Son that he considered it essential to his life, just as food is essential to human life:

John 4

- 31b. His disciples asked him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.”
32. But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.”

⁶ The usual translation of this verse, “I come to do thy will, O God,” is hardly correct. The Son was speaking to the Father, whom he was leaving; he was not speaking to us, to whom he was coming.

33. Then the disciples began asking one another, “Has someone brought him *something* to eat?”
34. Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work.”

To do the will of the Father was the Son’s entire purpose for coming to earth. He spoke of it when he was leaving heaven, and he spoke of it repeatedly while he was here, warning his followers that the only people he would consider to be his family are those who do the will of God as he did (Mt. 12:48–50). The Son absolutely loved his Father and was absolutely devoted to Him before, during, and after he came to earth.

THE FATHER SPOKE, TOO

The love that the Father feels for the Son and that the Son feels for the Father is profound. John’s famous statement, “God is love” (1Jn. 4:8, 16), sprang directly from the revelation that the first thing the Father created was someone to love. We can see how very much the Father and the Son enjoy each other’s company in such verses as Proverbs 8:30, where the Son describes their life together before the world began: “I was at His side, like a master workman, daily His great delight, always laughing in His presence.” This being the case, it must have grieved the Father deeply to send His Son away from Him.

When the Son left his happy home in glory to come to this cruel world to suffer and die, his devotion to the Father was revealed in his parting words: “I go to do your will, O God!” But the deep emotions which filled the Father’s heart were revealed when He responded with parting words of His own. Both Mark and Luke tell us that at that painful moment “there came a voice from heaven, saying, ‘You are my beloved Son; in you, I am well pleased’” (Lk. 3:22b). The story of the gospel is a story of love, not just God’s love for fallen man, but also, and primarily, the deep, abiding love that exists between God and His Son.

We should also note that the Father speaking to the Son when he left heaven shows us that the Son was a fully conscious being when he came into the world; had he not been, the Father would not have been talking to him. Surely, when the Father said, “You are my beloved Son”, He was speaking to someone who was really there, someone whom He dearly loved, not just to a good idea that was in His head. Otherwise, He would only have been talking to Himself.

“SUDDENLY”

Malachi prophesied of the day the Son would come from heaven and enter into the temple the Father had prepared for him:

Malachi 3

- 1b. “The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant whom you desire. Behold, he is coming!” says the LORD of hosts.⁷

⁷ The difference in Old Testament prophecies between “Lord” and “LORD” is that “Lord” often refers to the Son (as in several prophecies already quoted) and “LORD” refers to the Father. Psalm 110:1, to which Jesus himself referred in Matthew 22:41–45, is a famous and undeniable example of this.

In as much as Malachi said that when the Messiah came to his earthly temple, he would come “suddenly”, the virgin Mary could not be the temple the God had prepared for His Son (Ps. 40:6; Heb. 10:5). It took about nine months for the baby Jesus to be formed within Mary, and no one would call that sudden – least of all Mary. If, however, the Son of God *suddenly* came from heaven (in the form of a dove) and entered his temple when the son of Mary was baptized in the Jordan River, then “Jesus” is the name of the earthly temple that the Father had prepared for His Son.

Matthew 3

16. And when he had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water, and suddenly, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending in the form of a dove, and coming upon him.

The difference between the pre-baptism Jesus and the post-baptism Jesus was extraordinary, and it was extraordinary because the Son of God now occupied the ordinary human temple that Mary had borne for God. When the Son transferred his life out of his heavenly body into the earthly body that his Father had prepared for him, it was an extraordinary event. Paul described this event as the Son “emptying himself”, or “divesting himself”,⁸ and then taking on a human body:

Philippians 2

6. Existing in the form of God, [Christ] did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped after;
7. instead, he emptied himself, assuming the form of a slave, made in the likeness of men.
8. And being found as a man in appearance, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death – the death of a cross.

That last verse emphasizes the fact that once the Son had come into the world, he was “found as a man”; he was not found as a fertilized egg in Mary’s womb. The child that Mary bore was created in her womb by God, and so, physically, he was God’s son. But the Son of God through whom God “made the worlds” did not spend nine months being formed in Mary’s womb. In 1Corinthians 15:45–47, Paul calls Christ a second Adam. It is a fitting comparison, for as the first Adam began his life on earth as a fully formed man, so the Son of God began his earthly life as a fully formed man when he took upon himself the fully grown, earthly body of a man – Jesus.

⁸ That is, he left his spiritual body in heaven empty and entered into a natural, fleshly body on earth, thus laying aside his heavenly comforts and privileges.

TAKING US ON

Hebrews 2

14. Inasmuch, then, as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he likewise partook of flesh with them so that by means of death, he might destroy him who had the power of death (that is, the Accuser⁹)
15. and set free those who through fear of death their whole lives were subject to slavery.
16. For it is obvious that he did not take on himself *the nature of* angels, but took on himself the seed of Abraham.

Now, if the Son of God *took on* man's nature, then *on what* did he take it? There can be no answer to that question if God had no Son before Mary did. If the Son did not exist until Mary conceived and bore her child, then the Son could not have "taken on" man's nature because people who don't exist can't take on anything. Moreover, if Paul believed that there had been no Son living with the Father in heaven from the beginning, he could not have written about the Son either "divesting himself" of heavenly glory or "taking on himself" human nature. It would have made no sense to write such words. But Hebrews 2:16, above, tells us that the Son of God took the nature of man *on himself*, which means that the Son had a "himself" on which to take the nature of man, which, in turn, tells us that the Son of God *was himself* before he was a man.

The hidden Son of God could not die for our sins in heaven because up there, he was living in the incorruptible spiritual body given to him by the Father when He created him. He had to come down and take on a mortal human body in order to "taste of death" for us (Heb. 2:9). The Son of God was created immortal, like his Father (Heb. 7:3). He was also created as the "king of righteousness" (Heb. 7:2), and in the path of righteousness, "there is no death" (Prov. 12:28). To die, he had to come live on earth.

"HE IS WITH ME"

More happened at the Jordan River than the Son coming as a dove to his temple, for as we are told several times, the Son was in the Father, and the Father was in him (Jn. 10:38; Jn. 14:10–11; 17:21a). Therefore, when the Son came, the Father came with him, in spirit. Near the end of his earthly life, the Son told the disciples that the Spirit was *with* them but would soon be *in* them (Jn. 14:17), and he promised that when that happened, both he and the Father would dwell within them, too:

John 14

23. If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make *our* home with him.

⁹ "Devil" is the name usually employed here, but that name carries so much Christian mythological baggage that it should be used sparingly. The Greek word for "Devil" is best translated "Accuser" or "Slanderer", as Christian scholars since at least Lactantius (circa 240 – 320) have been known to do (e.g., *The Divine Institutes* II.ix). Also see Footnote 55, page 176.

This precious promise, that the Father and the Son would come dwell within believers, is the thing that moved Jesus to pray his earnest prayer that the Father would bless all those who believed in him with the same sweet unity that he and his Father had always known:

John 17

20. Not only do I pray for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word,
21. that they all might be one,¹⁰ just as you, Father, *are* in me, and I in you, that they may also be one in us, so that the world might believe that you sent me.
22. And the glory you have given me, I have given them, that they might be one just as we are one:
- 23a. I in them, and you in me, so that they might be perfected in unity.

Jesus' prayer began to be answered when the disciples received the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. From that day on, the disciples dwelt in the Father and in the Son, spiritually speaking, and the Father and the Son dwelt in them.

The holy Spirit *is* the Father, minus His celestial body. It is also the Son, minus his celestial body, for the Spirit is the Father's life, which He shared with His Son. When Jesus said, "He who sent me is with me" (Jn. 8:29), the people probably looked around to try to find the man who sent him. But Jesus was referring to his Father living within him, and at that time, no one could understand what he meant because no one but Jesus knew what it meant to have God living within.

It should be pointed out that Jesus' declaration of the Father being in him and he in the Father was neither a Trinitarian nor a Oneness confession. The Father is in His Son simply because He shared His life with the Son, and the Son is in the Father only because he shares his Father's life. It is the same way with all who believe on Jesus and receive the Father's holy kind of life. It was Jesus' greatest desire, indeed, his very purpose for suffering and dying, to make it possible for him and his Father to one day be in his disciples, and for them to be in him and his Father. When that glorious day came, Jesus promised his wondering disciples, they would no longer be in the dark about what he was saying: "In that day, you will know for yourselves that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (Jn. 14:20).

These were mysterious words, to be sure, impossible for the disciples to comprehend at the time they were spoken. However, later they did come to understand what it meant to be "in Christ" and for Christ to be in them.

THE PEOPLE'S CONFUSION: TWO SONS

Everyone who was acquainted with Mary's son knew where he had come from:

Matthew 13

54. When he came into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, and they were astonished and said, "Where'd this man get this wisdom and *these* miracles?"

¹⁰ See Footnote 4, page 10.

55. Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother called Mary, and his brothers, James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?
56. And his sisters, aren't they all with us? Then, where'd he get all these things?"

Although no scripture exists in the Old Testament that says so, the Jews of Jesus' time had obviously been taught that when the Messiah appeared, no one would know where he came from. So, since they knew where Mary's son came from, they were certain that Jesus could not be the Messiah: "We know where this man is from, but when the Messiah comes, nobody will know where he's from" (Jn. 7:27).

In the very next verse, the Son of God admitted to the people that they knew where his temple came from: "Jesus cried out as he taught in the temple, saying, "You know me, and you know where I am from" (Jn. 7:28a).

But everyone became confused when God's Son spoke of *his* homeland, where he had lived from the beginning with the Father:

John 6

32. Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I tell you, Moses did not give you bread from heaven, but my Father is giving you the true bread from heaven.
33. For the bread from God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."
34. Then they said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."
35. Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life."
- ...
41. Then the Jews started grumbling about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."
42. And they kept saying, "Isn't this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it, then, that he says, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

Every time the Son spoke of coming from God in heaven instead of from Mary in Nazareth, his words provoked turmoil:

John 7

- 28b. "I have not come on my own, but He who sent me is true, whom you do not know.
29. I know Him because I am from Him, and He sent me."
- 30a. Then they tried to seize him.

It is little wonder that even Jesus' relatives thought he had gone insane:

Mark 3

21. And his kinsmen came out to take him, for they were saying, "He's lost his mind."

Persecution notwithstanding, the Son of God never stopped testifying to everyone that he came from heaven instead of from Nazareth and from God instead of from Mary, which

completely bewildered those who had heard him say previously, “You know me, and you know where I am from”:

John 8

14. Jesus answered them, “You do not know where I come from or where I am going.

...

17. Even in your law it is written that the testimony of two men is true.

18. I am one who bears witness of myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness of me.”

19. Then they began to say to him, “Where is your father?” Jesus replied, “You do not know me or my Father; if you had known me, you would have known my Father also.”

So, according to Jesus’ own words, the people knew him and his father, and they did not know him and his Father; and they knew where he came from, and they did not know where he came from. So, what can we say about this, except that the people were confused, and they were not confused? They knew what they thought, but what they thought they knew was right only when speaking of Mary’s son. Of God’s Son, they knew nothing.

Jesus understood their predicament. And he loved them.





Chapter 2

God's Kind of Life

. . . having their understanding darkened,
being alienated from the life of God.

Ephesians 4:18

Section 1: Alienated

KINDS OF LIFE

God's Spirit is God's life (Rom. 8:10), just as your spirit is your life (Jas. 2:26), but God is not a big one of us. His kind of life is completely different from, and infinitely superior to our human kind of life, and to all others as well. God is so wise and so powerful that in creating all things, He not only conceived of different kinds of life, but He also brought those different life forms into existence. It is clear, even to children, that the kind of life God created in plants differs from the kind of life God created in animals. God also created heavenly beings with their own kind of life, and lastly, He created us humans with our kind of life, which is a little inferior to angels (Ps. 8:5; Heb. 2:7, 9) but very much superior to plants and animals (Gen. 1:26, 29). It may be true that humans were originally created to live forever, like the angels, but even so, neither humans nor angels were created with God's kind of life within them. Therefore, even if men and angels were created to live forever, they would not be living forever with God's kind of life but with their own.

Plants can vary widely in physical appearance and other attributes; still, they all share the same *kind* of life, the kind of life that makes them plants. Thus it is with the animal kingdom. Whether land animals, sea creatures, or birds that navigate the sky, all animals share the *kind* of life which makes them animals instead of plants, humans, or angels.¹¹ In spite of physical differences among plants, and among animals, humans, and angels, the *kind of life* which God created in them is unique to each group.

With each kind of life comes its own kind of knowledge. A plant can draw nutrients out of the soil because of its "knowledge" of what is useful for food. Admittedly, that kind of "knowledge" is such a low kind that it hardly qualifies to be called knowledge at all. Still, although plants do not make conscious choices, the selective drawing of nutrients out of the soil requires a kind of knowing, even if it is one of the lowest kinds of knowing in creation. Animal

¹¹ Angels are not the only species of creatures in heaven, but for the sake of brevity, I will sometimes use "angel" to represent them all.

life, on the other hand, is superior to plant life, and in that superior kind of life is a superior kind of knowledge. Plants, for example, are not conscious of animals, but animals are very much aware of plants. Animals that eat plants have knowledge from their Creator that enables them to recognize one plant from another and to discern what is edible and what is not, as well as where and when those plants grow. Plants have no more awareness of humans than they have of animals, of course, but animals are in some cases aware enough of humans to form relationships with them.

The kind of life that God gave humans when He created them makes it possible for humans to observe plants and animals, nurture them, and even train them. Likewise, angels, having been created with a kind of life superior to human life, have knowledge that is superior to human knowledge. They are more aware of us than we are of them, just as we are more aware of plants and animals than they are of us.

Let us suppose that you are a blade of grass growing in a cow pasture. Grass neither thinks nor sees, of course, but just imagine that you, as a blade of grass, saw a herd of hungry cows coming your way. If you and your fellow blades of grass could reason, you would all agree that it would not be right for grass to be eaten. You would probably even pass laws against eating grass. But cows have a completely different and higher standard for determining right conduct, and they would not even acknowledge grass law. Unlike grass, cows can see and think, and when they see grass, they rightly think “food”, for they were created to eat grass. In spite of whatever laws the grasses passed against eating grass, then, it would not be “unrighteous” for cows to eat it.

Of course, if cows were capable of our kind of reasoning, they would condemn the eating of cows, just as grasses would condemn the eating of grass. If they could, they, too, would pass laws forbidding the slaughter of their own kind. But humans, with their superior kind of life, would not acknowledge cow laws any more than cows would acknowledge grass laws. Humans were created with a superior standard for proper conduct that allows them to plant, nurture, harvest, and consume plants, as well as to breed, care for, slaughter, and eat animals – all in perfect innocence before God.

Continuing up the ladder of the kinds of life that God created, angels have a kind of life that is superior to humans, and they are guided by a knowledge that is superior to human knowledge. They cannot be judged by human laws any more than humans can be judged by cow or plant laws (if there were such things). Human laws against killing humans apply to human behavior; such laws mean nothing to angels. Angels have killed many thousands of humans (e.g., 2Kgs. 19:35) and, at the same time, have remained guiltless before God.

God’s life is, of course, the highest form of life, and in it are the highest forms of knowledge and righteousness. God is not subject to any law devised by any of His creatures, and He is much more aware of His creatures than any of His creatures are aware of Him. He can, in perfect righteousness, sustain or destroy plants, animals, humans, angels, or any other of His creatures, as He will. His knowledge is infinitely superior to all other kinds, and no creature can judge His actions. He is perfect in righteousness and knowledge, regardless of what any of His creatures think is right or wrong.

Before the Son came, he and the Father knew us, but we did not know them. They had powers and knowledge we never dreamed of. We were ignorant of God’s kind of life, as animals

are of ours. Animals were created with the capacity to understand things pertaining to animals, humans were created with the capacity to understand things pertaining to humans, and angels were created with the capacity to understand the things of angels. The Son alone was created with the capacity to understand the things of God (Lk. 10:22). We could not think God's thoughts or feel God's feelings. And just as with plants and animals in regard to us, we did not even know that we did not know. Mercifully, God came to us and told us what we were missing:

Isaiah 55

8. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways," says the LORD.
9. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

When God said, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways," He was speaking to man. But angels, though to a lesser extent, could say the same thing to man, and man could say the same thing to animals, and animals could say the same thing to plants. This is a part of the order which God has established throughout creation, and it cannot be abrogated.

All creatures except the Son were "alienated from the life of God". When the Son of God came to earth and walked among us, he said that he had come to earth so that we humans "might have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn. 10:10). We humans were already alive, but we were alive with *our* kind of life; we were aliens to the life of God. Moreover, our kind of life was under the curse of death (Gen. 3:17–19; Heb. 9:27). But even if human life had not been cursed, it would have been pointless for the Son to come and give us more of the same kind of life we already had. No amount of human life could make us holy or give us the knowledge of God – no, not a billion years of it. Indeed, no amount of any kind of life other than God's can make us His children (Rom. 8:9b) or enable us to understand Him (1Cor. 2:14). With their own kind of life, no plant, animal, man, or angel will ever know God (1Pet. 1:12), not even if they live forever.

The Father's kind life is unique and infinitely superior to all the kinds of life He created. His life is eternal; that is, it had no beginning, and it will have no end. The Son has that same kind of life within himself, but to him, it is everlasting life instead of eternal life because with him, it had a beginning. The beginning of the Son's life was when the Father gave it to him, and the Son spoke of this when he was here among us:

John 5

26. Just as the Father has life in Himself, so He has also given to the Son to have life in himself.

Likewise, the beginning of our life in Christ is when the Father shares His eternal life with us as He did with the Son when He created him. As with the Son, that life is everlasting life to us because with us, too, it had a beginning.

THE LIGHT OF GOD'S LIFE

The knowledge of God can be possessed only by those who possess God's kind of life, and the Son came from heaven to pay the price to make it available to *us* – not to plants, animals, or angels (Prov. 8:4) – so that we might know God and partake of the fellowship that He has with

His Son. We cannot understand God without a miracle of communication from heaven, and Jesus said that those who follow him would experience that miracle when they were enlightened with God's life:

John 8

12. Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of [God's] life."

How honored we are that God loved us so much that He chose for us to know His thoughts and ways! It is humbling to consider that of all the creatures God created, He chose to give *us* His life and to show *us* His ways:

Proverbs 8

4. Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the children of Adam.

God set His love on *us*! John confessed, "We love Him because He first loved us" (1Jn. 4:19) because John understood that *the only reason* any of us love God is that God loved us first and chose to reveal Himself to us. Love is God's idea, and He sent His Son to teach us that.

This is the beauty and the glory of the gospel, that we mortals can now share in the Father's life with the Son of God and can know His thoughts, His kind of love, His kind of righteousness, and be able to walk in His ways.

"NATURAL MEN"

Because of Jesus, we humans may now have the kind of life we knew nothing about but that knew everything about us. Paul explained this to the saints in Corinth:

1Corinthians 2

11. Who among men knows the things of a man except the spirit of man that is in him? Likewise, no one knows the things of God; just the Spirit of God.
12. Now, we have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit that is from God, so that we might understand the things freely given to us by God,
13. which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom but taught by the holy Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people.
14. A natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot comprehend them because they are spiritually discerned.

From creation to Pentecost, everyone, including the ancient prophets, were "natural men" (v. 14), and the hidden things of God would have seemed foolish to them all, even if someone had been able to teach such things. But nobody could tell of the hidden things of God because nobody knew about them. The prophets spoke the things of God, and those who heard them heard the things of God; however, neither the prophets nor those who heard them had the kind of life that would have enabled them to understand what the Spirit was talking about when it spoke (1Pet. 1:10–12).

"Natural men" are proud by nature, and although they are completely ignorant of God, some of them unwisely speak as authorities on what God will or will not do. One such man, a

professor of New Testament, told us seminarians that God would never kill an innocent child. He did not explain why the Bible plainly states the contrary, one example being the child born of David's adulterous affair with Bathsheba:

2Samuel 12

13. David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD!" And Nathan said to David, "The LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die.
14. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the son that is born to you shall surely die."
15. And Nathan went to his house. And the LORD struck the boy that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it was very sick.

...

18a. And it came to pass on the seventh day that the child died.

As I have said, God is not a big one of us. His ways and thoughts are far beyond what our kind of life can comprehend. If we succumb to our natural tendency to use our own ways as the standard by which to make judgments, we may find ourselves deciding, as my seminary professor did, what God will or will not do. But God does "all things according to the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11), not according to how His creatures think He ought to do them. Genuine faith in God creates in our hearts the understanding that God is good and right, no matter what He does – and no matter what we think. He was good when He cursed Adam and Eve with death; He was good when He destroyed the earth with a flood; He was good when He sent foreign armies into Canaan to take His people into captivity; and He was good when He sent His precious, hidden Son to this wicked world to be abused and crucified. Humans are the ones lacking in goodness, and nothing in our makeup as humans qualifies us to judge anything our Creator does. Without God's kind of life, we are all – even the very best of us – just "natural men".

THE BODY AND NATURE

A creature's body determines the nature of the creature.¹² This is true throughout creation, in both heaven and earth. A creature with animal life that has the body of a fish has the nature of a fish. It behaves as a fish, and it can only do what a fish with that kind of body can do. If you had the body of a fish, you would be a fish; you would think and act like a fish, and you could do nothing else. Paul touched on this issue when he categorized God's creatures, including even inanimate heavenly objects, on the basis of the kinds of bodies they possessed:

1Corinthians 15

39. Not all flesh is the same flesh; there is one kind for humans, another flesh for *land* animals, another flesh for fish, and another for birds.

¹² Differing body shapes and sizes among creatures with the same kind of life indicate different natures, not different kinds of life. A snake, for example, has as much animal life as a dog, but its nature differs from that of a dog because it possesses a different kind of body.

40. There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one sort, and that of the earthly, another.
41. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; indeed, star differs from star in glory.

It is unnatural for creatures to behave contrary to the kind of bodies they possess. Paul taught that if people behave contrary to the nature belonging to their body, they not only dishonor the Creator, but also dishonor the body that the Creator gave them (Rom. 1:24–27). Nevertheless, aware that spirits could possess their bodies with supernatural powers, some of the most celebrated men in history thought it an honor to be possessed by spirits foreign to their bodies – spirits they themselves called demons.

In the ancient world, the word “demon” had no evil connotation,¹³ and poets such as Homer and Virgil actually began their works with a prayer for certain demons to possess them and give them superhuman knowledge and eloquence so that they could tell their tales convincingly.¹⁴ In ancient Philippi, for another example, the owners of a demon-possessed slave-girl felt blessed that she was possessed because the supernatural knowledge which the demon revealed through her brought them much gain. Paul cast the demon out of the child, but the citizens of Philippi were outraged at what Paul did, and city officials had Paul and Silas flogged and thrown into prison because of it (Acts 16:16–23).

The most remarkable case in the Old Testament of someone’s body having a foreign nature control it is that of King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel warned the king to honor God for the power and glory that God had given him. But “at the end of twelve months, [the king] walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon,” and he began to boast of his own power and majesty (Dan. 4:27–30). But while the king’s proud boast was still on his tongue, God’s wrath came upon him and changed the human kind of life in his body to that of an animal, for seven long years:

Daniel 4

31. While the word was in the king’s mouth, a voice came down from heaven, saying, “To you it is spoken, O King Nebuchadnezzar: The kingdom is departed from you!
32. They will drive you away from men, and your dwelling will be with the beasts of the field. They will feed you grass like oxen, and seven times will pass over you until you learn that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and that He gives it to whomsoever He will.”
33. That very moment, the thing came upon Nebuchadnezzar, and he was driven from men, and he ate grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven until the hair of his head grew long like eagles’ *feathers* and his nails like birds’ *claws*.

As has been noted, the body and the nature are mutually inclusive. Therefore, the change in Nebuchadnezzar’s nature to that of an animal wrought animal-like changes to his human body.

¹³ Over a thousand years after the Son of God exposed demons as wicked, Dante, perhaps the greatest Christian poet, still called on demons to help him tell his tale (e.g., *Purgatorio*, 1:7-12).

¹⁴ E.g., Homer, *The Odyssey*, 1.1; Virgil, *The Aeneid*, 1.8; Dante, *The Inferno*, Canto II.6–8.

Once God restored to Nebuchadnezzar his human kind of life, the king's body lost its beastly qualities, and he could again act according to the nature that belonged to a human body. Then, as Daniel had pleaded with the king to do eight years before, Nebuchadnezzar humbled himself to God:

Daniel 4

37. I, Nebuchadnezzar, now praise and extol and give glory to the King of heaven, all whose works are right, and His ways, just. And those who walk in pride, He is able to abase.

CORRUPTED, NOT CHANGED

For God to punish a man by changing his nature was extremely rare. Usually, God's chastisement came in milder forms. For Adam and Eve, their punishment was to be cast out of the garden of Eden, to labor hard for their sustenance and, eventually, to die. Their human nature was corrupted by sin, but it remained human, and they continued to act and think like humans even while they were being punished.

Before their fall, a creature who lived in heaven had corrupted his nature. Satan was created as an upright, especially anointed cherub,¹⁵ "perfect in beauty",¹⁶ but his cherub nature was corrupted by pride (Ezek. 28:12–15, 17). God did not change Satan's nature. Satan still acted and thought like a cherub. His perfect beauty was unchanged, and he appeared to be the same holy creature he had always been. Thus it was that, in Satan, creation was introduced to a creature who was evil but did not appear to be. The Son of God called Satan the father of lies (Jn. 8:44) because Satan was the first of God's creatures to seem to be upright when he was not. From the moment Satan became proud, God, who alone knows the heart, saw Satan for what he was, but God was the only one to see Satan that way because *to see beyond appearances is impossible for anyone without God's kind of life*.

When the Son of God came and walked among men, he saw men's hearts as God did because he had God's kind of life. And seeing the hearts, he called some men "sons of Satan" because, like Satan, they appeared to be good but were not:

Matthew 23

27. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees! Hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear to be so very lovely, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.
28. That's how you are! Outwardly, you appear righteous to men, but inwardly, you are full of pretense and lawlessness.

A GOOD DIFFERENCE

When we look at a tree, we recognize it as a tree because of its "body". Likewise, when we see a horse, a human, or any other creature, we recognize it as being what it is because of the

¹⁵ Satan is not an angel. Cherubs and seraphs, etc., are species of heavenly creatures different from angels.

¹⁶ Medieval Christian myth-makers, with their invention of an ugly Devil who went about encouraging immorality and disorder, did a great disservice to the world. By leading the minds of men in the wrong direction, those myth-makers helped the real Satan to remain disguised.

body we see. The body tells us, first, what kind of life is in it, and second, what kind of nature to expect. That is the natural order of things. Normally, whenever a body is taken over by a kind of life foreign to it, an unnatural and bad thing has happened. However, even though it was unnatural when the body of Mary's son was taken over by the heavenly Son of God at the Jordan River, it was a good thing. It was, in fact, a *very* good thing, for it was "God with us" in human form (Isa. 7:14; Mt. 1:23). The experience wrought so dramatic a change in Jesus, the son of Mary, that he described it as being "born again"¹⁷ (Jn. 3:7), but his experience was more than dramatic; it was *good*. King Nebuchadnezzar's experience, as well as the experience of others whose bodies were possessed by spirits other than their own, was dramatic, but it was bad.

Because of the Son, God's kind of life became for us what Jesus, Peter, and Paul called "the gift of God",¹⁸ and the giving of that gift to humans is the watershed experience in human history. The gift of God's kind of life was the "new thing" that God mysteriously promised through Isaiah (Isa. 43:19), and it is available now to everyone on earth because of the sacrifice that the Son made in heaven after his resurrection and ascension (Heb. 10:10).

When Adam and Eve had children, their fallen, sinful nature was passed on to their offspring, which is the natural order of life throughout creation. *The one thing that parents of every kind pass on to their offspring, in addition to their kind of life, is their kind of body and the nature that goes with it.* It is impossible for eagle parents to produce anything but eagles, or for flowers, or humans, or other creatures, to produce anything but their own kind.

When Jesus was born to Mary, his fleshly body defined him. It defined him first of all as a human being, just as all humans since Adam had been defined. It also defined him as male instead of female. And finally, when his infant body was circumcised, it defined him as a Jew. However, when the Son came into Jesus' body, that fleshly, circumcised body no longer defined him. Nor could it. The body was earthly, but the Son of God was heavenly.

To everyone on earth and in heaven, it appeared that Jesus was still merely the son of Mary, and that is the basis on which everyone except the Father judged Jesus. That is how the world looks at all who, like Jesus, are "born of God" (1Jn. 3:9; 5:1). From Pentecost morning until now, whenever believers are born again, their unchanged earthly bodies have given the impression that they are still human, like everybody else on earth, but they are not. They are "new creatures" in Christ Jesus (2Cor. 5:17), children of God (1Jn. 3:1), and aliens to this world (1Pet. 2:11), and they yearn for the new, eternal bodies Jesus has promised them so that who they really are may be manifest:

Romans 8

19. For the earnest longing of the creation eagerly awaits the manifestation of the sons of God.

2Corinthians 5

2. In this *house* [this body] we groan, longing to be clothed with our home that is from heaven.

¹⁷ Or, "born from above".

¹⁸ Jesus, in John 4:10; Peter, in Acts 8:20; and Paul, in both Romans 6:23 and 2Timothy 1:6.

Until the day that Jesus returns with our new bodies, we wait patiently and rejoice just to be children of God, even if the world does not recognize us:

1John 3

1. Oh, what great love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! This is why the world does not know you, because it did not know Him.
- 2a. Beloved, we are now children of God, but what we shall be is not yet made manifest.

In God's family, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor freeman, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Like Jesus after the Son entered his temple, the earthly body of those who are born again reveals nothing about them any longer. As long as they are in their fleshly bodies, they will appear to the world to be either Jew or Gentile, male or female, old or young, or white, red, black, or yellow, and that is how the world judges them. But Paul said, "We look not at things that are seen, but at things that are not seen, for things that are seen are temporal, but things that are not seen are eternal" (2Cor. 4:18).

The Spirit's entrance "circumcises" our hearts from worldly connections that are seen, and makes us children of Abraham, spiritual Jews (Rom. 2:28–29), enabling us to say from our heart what Jesus said:

Matthew 12

50. Whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

The souls of those who possess God's kind of life have already been delivered from death (Jn. 5:24; 1Jn. 3:14). The salvation Jesus will bring with him when he returns is for the body, not the soul. The new bodies that Jesus will bring to God's children (1Cor. 15:35–44) are bodies appropriate to their new nature and are the reward he will give to those who are faithful to him in this life (Isa. 40:10; 62:11). Paul repeatedly spoke of the day Jesus would return to "transform our lowly body into the likeness of his glorious body" (Phip. 3:21), and that glorification of the body is the unique hope of everyone who has been born again.

CHANGES MADE BY GOD'S LIFE

Here are several of the qualities of our Father that are created within us by the entrance of His kind of life:

Understanding. Through the prophet Isaiah, God said that His thoughts are not human (Isa. 55:8), but no one at that time understood how true that was. It is impossible for humans to think the thoughts of God. However, people who receive God's kind of life begin to think His kind of thoughts. It is true that "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered the heart of man the things God has prepared for those who love Him"; however, it is also true that "God has revealed them to us by His Spirit" (1Cor. 2:9–10). Nobody knows all that God knows, not even the Son (Mk. 13:32), but that kind of ignorance does not come from sin; it comes from not being God, which is a condition shared equally by all creatures. The entrance of the Spirit simply empowers a person to

view things from God's perspective and to understand things in ways that humans cannot comprehend on their own.

Righteousness. God's life creates within people a new nature, within which is a kind of righteousness that far surpasses all human righteousness. When God puts His kind of righteousness in men's hearts, His righteousness and peace and joy govern that man's every thought and word and deed. About half a century ago, my father made this perceptive comment in a sermon:

“When a person receives the holy Ghost and walks in it, he can do anything in the world he wants to do, and thank God for it, because the Spirit brings with it God's nature, and God's nature only wants what is good.”

God's kind of righteousness equips men to do as God would do in every earthly situation. It is not a philosophical concept; it is a practical way of living in God's wisdom and goodness. With God's life, and with the new nature it brings, the believer is made holy as God is holy, though still living in this unholy world:

Titus 2

11. For the saving grace of God has appeared to all men,
12. teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world.

Prophetic Insight. Jesus told his disciples that when God gave them His life, it would show them things to come (Jn. 16:13). This is one reason the Spirit we receive from God is called the Spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19:10). Now that the Spirit has come, we have been made like God in the sense that we are given Godlike insight into the future. We know how the world will end, even if we do not yet know when. (While here among us, the Son admitted that he did not know when, either – Mark 13:32.) And knowing how the world will end, we can follow events that transpire among nations with an understanding that even the wisest rulers of this world do not possess.

Perfect Judgment. “The entrance of your words gives light,” said the psalmist (Ps. 119:130), and when the Spirit writes the law of God on our hearts (Heb. 8:8–11), it circumcises us from earthly partisanship so that we can judge all things without fleshly partiality. It is not possible for humans without God's life to rightly judge those they love or their cherished causes because human love perverts human judgment. God's life, His Spirit, circumcises our hearts from earthly entanglements and personal preferences, and it replaces those things with Godlike love and impartiality. Then, as creatures living among the lower life forms of earth, saints are able to judge all things, both people and situations, as God does, as Paul said:

1Corinthians 2

14. A natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot comprehend them because they are spiritually discerned.
15. But a spiritual person judges everything, yet he himself is judged by no one.

Authority. The apostle Paul taught that God “made *us* alive together with Christ . . . and raised *us* up together, and sat *us* down with *him* in heavenly places”¹⁹ (Eph. 2:5–6). This being the case, whenever God’s children gather in the fellowship of God’s life, it is an authoritative event. In Psalm 133, David spoke by the Spirit about New Testament saints and said that when they came together in harmony, their fellowship carries authority like that of Israel’s high priest – and every Israelite had to submit to the judgment of the high priest or be put to death (Dt. 17:8–12)! Such fellowship was unknown under the law. No number of Israelites, regardless of how much harmony they had, was equal to the authority of God’s high priest. But since, in this New Covenant, the least among the saints is greater than the greatest under the Old (Mt. 11:11), the collective decisions of a body of faithful believers in Christ, regardless of its size, bears such weight that it can be opposed only at the risk of one’s soul. The authority that comes with the anointing of God is so magnified in this covenant that Jesus said heaven would stand behind the judgments of even a few saints who were gathered in his name (Mt. 16:19; 18:18–20).

Deathlessness. When we receive God’s kind of life, we are re-created as beings who will never die, for God’s life is eternal. But eternal life is actually a *kind* of life; it is the way God lives, and it has nothing whatsoever to do with time. Jesus described this kind of life as “a pearl of great price”, adding that wise men are willing to give all they own to obtain it (Mt. 13:46). Paul, too, described God’s life as a treasure, even if it is at the present time hidden within “earthen vessels” (2Cor. 4:7). Our physical bodies will die; nothing the Son did reversed the curse of death that God placed on Adam and Eve and their descendants (Gen. 3:17–19). Jesus himself had to die. Every human being is born under the sentence of death because we are all born with a sinful nature (Rom. 3:23; 5:12; Ps. 51:5). To deny that is to lie (1Jn. 1:8–10). Being humans descended from cursed parents, we must all face the enemy called death (1Cor. 15:26), and we will all lose that battle. Long ago, Solomon pointed this out:

Ecclesiastes 8

8. There is no man who has control over the spirit, to retain the spirit; neither has he control in the day of death. There is no discharge in that war.

What Solomon said, however, applied only to descendants of the first Adam. In Christ, our second Adam, we *have* been discharged from that war! Death no longer has power over us:

John 11

25. Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even if he dies,

26a. and everyone who lives and believes in me will never, ever die.”

In Christ Jesus, we are free from the curse of sin and death, “for as by one man’s disobedience, many were made sinners, so also by the obedience of one man, many will be made righteous” (Rom. 5:19). Children of God are created to live forever with Him,

¹⁹ Or, “sat us down with *him* among heavenly beings”.

just like the Son, through whom they have been given the inestimable gift of God's kind of life.

PLEASING GOD

The qualities of our Father's nature described above are ours in Christ, and if we live according to that nature, we will please God just as Jesus did (Jn. 15:10; 1Jn. 2:6). Before we received God's life, it was impossible for us to live according to God's nature and please Him (Rom. 8:7), but with that life, it is possible. Paul told the saints in Colossae that the very reason they were given God's life was

Colossians 1

10. that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *to him*, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Paul explained it this way to the Philippian saints:

Philippians 2

13. It is God who is working within you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

The Father is not here on earth in person. He is sitting on His heavenly throne, with the Son at His right hand. In this covenant, nothing on this cursed earth is holy except the people who have been made holy by the entrance of God's holy Spirit. Moreover, God has given nothing holy for men on earth to receive except His life, the holy Spirit (Rom. 8:10). This is the reason Paul taught that whoever does not have God's life does not belong to God (Rom. 8:9b) and has no hope of salvation (Eph. 2:12). But with God's life, we do belong to God and we do have hope, for Christ in us is our hope (Col. 1:27).

SECTION 2: HISTORY'S TURNING POINT

RECEIVING GOD'S LIFE

After the resurrected Son returned to heaven and offered himself to the Father as a sacrifice for our sins, the Father shared His kind of life with those on earth who believed in His Son:

Acts 2

1. When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were in one accord, in one place.
2. And suddenly there was a sound from heaven like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.
3. And there appeared to them divided tongues like fire, and it sat upon each of them,
4. and they were all filled with holy Spirit, and they began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit moved them to speak.

As important as the Son's coming to earth was, his coming to earth was not the Turning Point in human history. *The Turning Point in human history was when God's purpose for the Son's coming was fulfilled: the day of Pentecost, when God shared His kind of life with humans.* It was

essential for the Son to come and suffer, and for him to be resurrected and to ascend to offer himself to the Father for our sins. But the *purpose* for the Son's death, resurrection, ascension, and sacrifice was what followed: *God's acceptance of the Son's sacrifice and then, at the Son's request, the Father's sharing of His kind of life with man* (Acts 2:33; Heb. 9:12). For the followers of Jesus, that event was a baptism with God's life, and it created a new nation on earth, the nation of God's children, human in form but with God's kind of life within.

This new nation would eventually be comprised mostly of Gentiles, to whom God would offer His kind of life after the Jews had rejected Christ. No one expected God to do that. The Jews considered the Gentiles to be so unclean that they were unfit even to visit (Acts 11:2–3). Jesus even called them “dogs” (Mt. 15:22–26). God Himself likened the Gentiles to wild beasts, but beasts who would one day respond to God's mercy and honor Him for it:

Isaiah 43

20. The beast of the field will honor me, the jackals, and the unclean fowl because I give waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen.
21. I planned this people for myself, and they shall declare my praise.
22. But you did not call on me, Jacob. You grew tired of me, O Israel.

Prophets had been foretelling of the coming of this new nation for centuries, though nobody at the time, not even the prophets themselves, understood what their prophecies meant:

Psalms 102

18. This shall be written for the generation to come, and a people that will be created will praise the LORD.²⁰

Psalms 22

30. A seed shall serve Him, and it shall be accounted to the Lord²¹ for a generation.
31. They shall come and declare His righteousness to a people that shall be born, that He has done this.

Isaiah 66

- 8a. Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth²² be born in one day? Shall a nation be born at once?

Paul spoke of three distinct groups of people on earth: Jews, Gentiles, and God's children (1Cor. 10:32). This nation of new creatures was born on the day of Pentecost. It is a nation whose life did not come from an earthly source and cannot be comprehended by any earthly creature. Their very existence of this people is “hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). That is why, as the prophet foretold, the world does not acknowledge the nation of God's saints (Num.

²⁰ See Footnote 6, page 15.

²¹ See Footnote 6, page 15.

²² Prophetically, “earth” sometimes refers to God's New Testament people. More examples are given in Chapter 4.

23:9). Men cannot acknowledge God's nation because it is not of this world (Jn. 18:36), and no creatures, including humans, can comprehend anything above the realm of their own kind of life.

Only the nation of new creatures in Christ can truly understand the gospel. Plants cannot understand it; animals cannot understand it; humans cannot understand it (1Cor. 2:13–14); even angels cannot understand it (1Pet. 1:12). The time is coming when the children of God will be revealed for who they are (Rom. 8:19; 1Jn. 3:2), and in that day, they will be appointed their places in their Father's kingdom and reign with Christ on earth for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4). Until then, however, the existence of a nation of holy creatures on earth will remain as unbelievable to this world as was the Son of God when he was here. The world does not believe in the Son, and therefore, it cannot recognize those who, like him, are born of God. As John said, "This is why the world does not know you, because it did not know Him" (1Jn. 3:1b).

Jesus forewarned his disciples of the misunderstanding and hatred they would face in this world (Jn. 15:20), and later, his disciple John warned the children of God that only those who had been touched by God would be able to believe their testimony: "We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us" (1Jn. 4:6).

To stress the supreme importance of the Spirit's coming at Pentecost is not to diminish the importance of the Son's coming to live on earth. As I have said, the very reason the Son was sent to earth was to make it possible for humans to receive God's kind of life (Jn. 10:10). Everything the Son did while on earth was important, but his accomplishment of God's purpose for sending him is the most important event of all. And that purpose was to make the way for humans to receive (or "be baptized with") God's life and be born into God's family. That unparalleled blessing is what makes the Pentecost experience in Acts 2 the Turning Point in human history.

THE SPRINKLING OF BLOOD

The New Testament did not begin in Matthew, just as the Old Testament did not begin in Genesis. The Old Testament began in Exodus 24, when Moses sprinkled "the blood of the covenant" on the people whom God had chosen and prepared (Ex. 24:6–8). The author of Hebrews refers to this momentous event:

Hebrews 9

19. When every commandment of the law had been spoken by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of bullocks and goats . . . and sprinkled both the book and all the people,
20. saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you."

The scriptures leading up to Exodus 24 are important, for they tell us why a covenant between God and man was needed and how God prepared a people upon whom to sprinkle the blood of the covenant. However, the covenant remained unratified until that sprinkling of blood took place. The New Testament followed this pattern of ratification by the sprinkling of blood upon chosen and prepared people, but this time, the mediator was Jesus, not Moses, and the blood that he "sprinkled" on people was the Spirit.

The blood is what gives life to the body (Lev. 17:11), and since the Spirit is what gives life to the body of Christ, the apostles routinely referred to the Spirit as the blood of Christ.²³ This invisible “blood” is the life of God, His holy Spirit, which is “sprinkled” on the hearts of sinners who repent, purging them from their sins:

Hebrews 10

22a. Let us draw near with a true heart, in the full assurance of faith, *our* hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.

Differences of opinion abound concerning when the initial sprinkling of the holy Spirit took place, but the truth of the matter is simple. The Spirit was poured out after Jesus ascended and was glorified (Jn. 7:39), and since Jesus ascended into heaven in Acts 1, the Spirit must have first been sprinkled on believers on the day of Pentecost, in Acts 2. The New Testament was not ratified in the Gospels when the Son came; it was ratified in Acts when the Spirit came. In Acts 2, the life-giving spiritual blood of the risen Christ was sprinkled from heaven upon believers huddled in an upper room in Jerusalem, and the New Testament was begun.

Afterward, the apostles often referred to the Spirit as “the blood of Christ”. The author of Hebrews taught that “without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness” (Heb. 9:22), and it is more than a coincidence that in Peter’s first sermon as a born-again man, he used this “shedding of blood” imagery:

Acts 2

32. This Jesus has God raised up, of which we all are witnesses!
33. Moreover, being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the holy Spirit, he has shed forth this, which you yourselves now see and hear.

FILLED, NOT TOUCHED

On the day of Pentecost, for the first time ever, God shared His kind of life with someone other than His Son. In the millennia before Pentecost, on rare occasions, God granted to special individuals a *taste* of His kind of life, but He never fully shared it with them as He shared it with His Son. If He had shared His life with them, those individuals would have been completely transformed into new and holy creatures, but the Father was reserving for His Son the honor of doing that.

King David was one of those privileged individuals. He tasted of New Testament mercy when God forgave him of adultery and murder (2Sam. 11:1–12:13), sins that could not be forgiven under the law of Moses (Ex. 21:14; Lev. 20:10; Acts 13:39). The experience made David a stranger to his fellow Israelites and was one cause of the civil war that followed, pitting Israelites who loved David against those who did not. Job was another example. God crushed that “perfect and upright man”, forcing Job into such lowliness of heart that he was able to sense a different kind of righteousness, the righteousness of God that was beyond all earthly

²³ Examples: 1Cor. 10:16; Heb. 9:14; 10:29; 12:24; 1Pet. 1:2; and Rev. 7:14. See my tract, “The Blood of Christ”, available online at GoingtoJesus.com.

perfection.²⁴ And God hid Moses in the cleft of a rock until He passed by, and then He released Moses so that he could catch a glimpse of His glory from behind. Just that momentary glimpse of God's eternal brightness made Moses' face shine so that no one on earth could bear to look at Moses, and for the rest of his life, Moses had to cover his face with a veil to protect the eyes of his fellow Israelites. And lastly Solomon, with just a touch of divine wisdom, was driven to the brink of insanity by the profound thoughts he began to have. None of these Old Testament holy men could have survived more than the tiny bits of God's kind of life they tasted, and they were all permanently changed by the bits of eternal life they experienced.

In stark contrast to these ancient brushes with God's kind of life, Jesus' disciples were filled with God's life on the day of Pentecost, not just touched by it. God's love, righteousness, glory, power, and wisdom – God's kind of life – became theirs. Before Pentecost, God had only one Son with His kind of life, whereas after Pentecost, He had many (Rom. 8:29), none of them as great as the Son, but all of them greater than anyone who had ever lived before (Mt. 11:11). It took time for the apostles to comprehend the magnitude of this amazing grace from God, but they felt it the moment the Spirit came, and they rejoiced in it.

To receive God's kind of life is an astonishing grace. It is God's best gift, purchased for us by the sacrifice of His Son. God's life makes those who are chosen to receive it children of God (Rom. 8:14), citizens of a heavenly country (Heb. 11:16), and "foreigners and pilgrims" in this world (Heb. 11:13). Misunderstood, just as Jesus was, God's faithful children are routinely slandered and persecuted by ungodly people (1Pet. 3:16; 2Tim. 3:12). Yet, in Paul's judgment, the benefits of possessing God's kind of life far outweigh the pain of being hated in this world for it (Rom. 8:18). In the midst of great persecutions, Paul could still write, "Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift!" (2Cor. 9:15).

FILLED WITH HIS FULLNESS

When the life of God enters a man, he becomes a partaker of God's nature (2Pet. 1:4). He is no longer by nature sinful but holy, as God is holy. From the moment God's nature becomes his, it becomes as natural for a man to do good and to know the truth as it is for the Son of God.

The beginning of the New Testament was when God's life was given to about 120 souls who loved Jesus, and humans were at last "delivered from the domain of darkness and translated into the kingdom of [God's] beloved Son" (Col. 1:13). Because of that new kinship with God, odd as it may sound, *Jesus' followers had more fellowship with him after he left and the Spirit came than they did while he walked with them in the flesh.* Being Israelites, they had belonged to God since their first birth, but having fellowship with God became a reality for them only when they received God's kind of life and were born again.

Those of the Oneness and Trinitarian faiths misinterpret Paul's statement that in Jesus "dwells all the fullness of God's nature, bodily" (Col. 2:9; 1:19). They quote such verses as proof-texts for their competing doctrines, both of which, in their own way, hold that the Father and the Son are co-equal in all respects. Paul never taught such a doctrine, nor did he intend such phrases as this one from Colossians to be interpreted to mean that the Son is equal with the Father.

²⁴ More on Job's story in Chapter 6.

None of God's children, including the Son, could possibly be as great or as good as their heavenly Father. Thus, the Son could say to his disciples, "The Father is greater than I" (Jn. 14:28), and to the rich young ruler, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but One; *that is, God*" (Mt. 19:17). When Jesus' followers received God's kind of life in Acts 2, they received *some* of God's Spirit, not all of it (Acts 2:17). So it was with the Son. In creating the Son with His kind of life, the Father did not give the Son everything that was in Him. Moreover, if the fact that God's fullness was in Jesus is to be interpreted as meaning that the Son is equal with the Father, then what are we to make of Paul's exhortation for believers to be "filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19)? Was Paul teaching that all who receive God's Spirit are equal with God? Of course not. For God's children to be "filled with His fullness" does not mean that they are equal with God any more than the Son being "filled with His fullness" means that he was equal with God. To be "filled with His fullness" means only to be filled with His Spirit, so that our words and our deeds reflect His holy nature.

"THE PRINCE OF LIFE"

The Father created the Son as such a perfect reflection of Himself that the Son also has power to create. The Son holds all power in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28:18), and by his word the universe was not only created, but is still being held together (Heb. 1:2; Col. 1:17). He mirrors the Father in everything:

John 5

19. Jesus answered and said to them, "Truly, truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but only what he sees the Father do, for whatever things He does, these things the Son also does, in the same way.
20. For the Father delights in the Son and shows him everything that He Himself is doing, and greater works than these will He show him that will make you marvel.
21. For as the Father raises the dead and gives *them* life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will."

Peter walked and talked with the Son for several years, but only after being born of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost did Peter refer to Jesus as "the Prince of life" (Acts 3:15). Before God's kind of life entered into Peter and began creating within him the knowledge of the Son, Peter would not have dared to refer to anyone but God as the "Prince of life". The revelation of the Son that God's life brought to the disciples taught them that someone was sitting beside God in heaven who was also to be praised, and before whom they must also bow, and after Pentecost, they began to preach that astonishing message *without fear of displeasing God!* With the revelation of that other divine being, righteous men began to honor as God both the Father and the Son, proclaiming that the revealed Son was the Prince of life, but never forgetting that the Father remained the King of it.

GOD'S GODS

Even before the Son came, whenever God spoke to men and women, the voice of God changed them; it elevated them above the ordinary course of human life. They were no longer

like the people to whom God had not spoken, and they were powerless to change that. It was the work of God. Because of the great difference God's voice made in the lives of those who heard it, God called them "gods". These gods were such people as Moses (Ex. 7:1), Israel's judges and elders (Ex. 22:28; Ps. 82:1, 6), and, obviously, the prophets.²⁵ When certain rulers of the Jews condemned Jesus for referring to himself as God's Son, Jesus quoted what his Father had spoken to Israel a thousand years before:

John 10 (cp. Ps. 82:6)

34. Jesus answered them, "Isn't it written in your law, 'I said you are gods'?"
35. If He called them 'gods' to whom the word of God came – and the Scripture cannot be contradicted –
36. are you telling the one whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said I am God's Son?"

If "gods" was an adequate term for those under the law to whom the word of God came, then how much more appropriate is the title, "gods" for those who possess God's kind of life? As I have said, it is a simple, unalterable principle of creation that children are whatever their parents are, even if on a smaller scale. All parents pass on to their offspring their kind of life. Animals receive animal life from their parents, plants receive plant life from their parents, and God's children receive God life when they are born of Him.

God's is the most extraordinary kind of life that exists, and when He created the Son with His kind of life, the Son was made the same kind of being the Father is, which made it possible for John to say the Son was both with God and was God (Jn. 1:1). The Son, in turn, loved us so much that he was willing to die to make his Father's kind of life available to us so that we would no longer be sinful. And as with the Son, when we received that life, we became the same kind of being the Father is, so that John could say, "As He is, so are we in this world" (1Jn. 4:17).

HOW DID HE DO IT?

We will never escape mystery when we are dealing with the things of God because His kind of life is far above ours. Even when He chooses to reveal one of His mysteries to a man, that man is hard-pressed to adequately convey the revelation to others. When John attempted to explain the mystery of the Son coming from heaven, even he, an uneducated fisherman, began to sound like a philosopher:

1John 1

1. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we beheld, and our hands touched: the Word of life.
2. And the life was revealed, and we saw *it*, and we are bearing witness and showing you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us.

What mysterious language! John's "eternal life" that was with the Father in 1John 1:2, above, is "the Word" which John said was "with God, and was God" in John 1:1. And at the end

²⁵ Among other scriptures that refer to humans as gods are: Genesis 3:5 (with Gen. 3:22); Exodus 4:16; 7:1; 21:6; 22:8–9; 1Samuel 28:13 (one of the gods being Samuel the prophet); Psalms 97:7; 138:1.

of the first verse, John combines these two terms, “Word” and “life”, to refer to the Son as “the Word of life”. The Spirit that entered the son of Mary as he came up from the Jordan River was this “Word of life”, who from the beginning “was with God, and was God.” And even though in 1John 1:1, John says that eternal life *is* the Son, he stated in the opening of his Gospel that God’s life is *in* the Son (Jn. 1:4). John was laboring in both verses to describe a reality that is beyond all human experience and understanding.

What the Father did in sending His Son to become one of us demonstrates the supreme superiority of His kind of life over ours. We humans have no power to take upon ourselves the form of a lower kind of life, such as plants or animals, and then to live as one of them. We can, for example, love horses, own horses, and train and ride horses. We could even move into the barn and sleep with horses. Still, we have no power to actually become horses and share horse-life with them. However, such limitations do not apply to God. And the Son, created as the exact reflection of God, had the power to make himself a partaker of our lower kind of life and to become one of us! The Son “emptied himself” of his heavenly glory (Phip. 2:7), came to earth, and blended himself with Mary’s son. “With men,” as Jesus would say, “it is impossible. But not with God, for with God all things are possible” (Mk. 10:27).

No human explanation is adequate for what took place at the Jordan River when the Son of God descended upon the Son of Mary, forever becoming one person with him. But God does the same thing every time that He and the Son, by the Spirit, come take their abode within a believer (cp. Jn. 14:23). It is a new kind of birth into a new kind of life that is beyond the power of man either to perform or to comprehend. The blending of two spirits within one body is not in the realm of ordinary human experience. God just does it, and God alone knows how.

“IN THE SPIRIT” OR “IN THE FLESH”

Paul is credited for coining the phrase, “in Christ”. He certainly used it often, and effectively. Another well-known phrase associated with Paul is, “in the flesh”. Paul used “the flesh” in two ways. First, he used it as a reference to the human body, but secondly, and more importantly, Paul used it to refer to the *nature* of the human body. In the following verses, every time Paul used a phrase like “the flesh” or “after the flesh”, it is replaced with “human nature” or “according to human nature”. And wherever he mentioned “the Spirit” or “after the Spirit”, it is replaced with “God’s nature” or “according to God’s nature”. You will see how much clearer these verses become when we do that:

Romans 8

1. There is now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus who do not live according to human nature but according to God’s nature.
...
5. Those who live according to human nature mind the things of the flesh, but those who live according to God’s nature *mind* the things of the Spirit.
...
7. Human nature is hostile to God. It is not subject to God’s law; nor, indeed, can it be.
8. Those who live according to human nature cannot please God.

...

13. If you live according to human nature, you will die, but if by God's nature you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Galatians 5

16. Live according to God's nature, and you will not carry out the desire of human nature.
17. For human nature desires *what is* contrary to God's nature, and God's nature *desires what is* contrary to human nature. These are opposed to one another, so that things you may desire, you do not do.
18. But if you are led by God's nature, you are not under *the* law.
19. Now, the works of human nature are obvious, which are: adultery, immorality, uncleanness, licentiousness,
20. idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, strife, emulations, angry outbursts, rivalries, disputes, factions,
21. envyings, murders, bouts of drunkenness, revelings, and things like these (concerning which things I forewarn you, as I also warned *you* previously, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God).
22. But the fruit of God's nature is love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, faith,
23. meekness, self-control. Against such, there is no law.

Philippians 3

3. We are the circumcision who serve God according to God's nature, and boast in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in human nature.

The saints' kind of warfare, the warfare of the flesh against the kind of life that is now within it, was first fought by Jesus, and he won the battle in just forty days. Jesus the Son of God, who was from both Nazareth and heaven, went into the wilderness, overcame the nature of the flesh, and returned from the wilderness "in the power of the Spirit" (Lk. 4:14). My father once told me that it took him forty years, not forty days like Jesus, to completely subdue his fleshly nature, and then he told me, "It needn't take you that long." It need not take any of us that long. Whether forty days or forty years, however, it must be done. Paul's warning in Romans 8:13 was for the children of God, not for sinners: "If you live after the flesh, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

Everyone with God's Spirit within them, like Jesus in the wilderness, does battle with the flesh because inwardly they are new creatures, born not "of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (Jn. 1:13b). The saints' flesh no longer defines them; yet, as long as the flesh has life, it will try to. The Son's greatest challenge was not to overcome Satan; it was simply to be who God created him to be in the face of opposition from the nature of his fleshly body.²⁶ This is the greatest challenge of all who are born of God, even if they do not realize it, or perhaps especially when they do not realize it. Decades after receiving God's kind of life, Paul was still wrestling his flesh into submission to the Spirit:

²⁶ More on this in Chapter 7.

1Corinthians 9

26. So then, I do not race around aimlessly; I do not box like someone punching the air.
27. On the contrary, I discipline my body and make it obey, lest after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.

God's life makes us foreigners to our own earthly bodies, and as new creatures in Christ, the warfare of God's children on earth is a warfare against who they used to be and who the flesh thinks they still are. It is a warfare to be who they truly are in Christ.

A NEW CREATION FOR NEW CREATURES

In the end, this entire universe will be destroyed and replaced by a new one suited to the new creatures that God has created in Christ Jesus (2Pet. 3:7–14). Jesus told his disciples that the present "heaven and earth shall pass away" (Mt. 24:35), and later, John was allowed to see the new heaven and earth that God has prepared for His new people (Rev. 21:1). Peter exhorted the saints to live according to their new nature so that they would be found worthy to live on the new earth that is coming:

2Peter 3

10. The day of the Lord shall come like a thief in the night, in which the heavens shall pass away with a roar, and the elements, consumed with burning heat, shall be destroyed, and earth and the works that are in it shall be burned up.
11. So then, seeing that all these things are to be destroyed, what kind of people ought you to be in all holy conduct and godliness,
12. looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, in which the heavens, being on fire, shall be destroyed, and the elements, consumed with heat, shall be dissolved?
13. But we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.
14. Therefore, beloved, seeing that you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

To obtain this promised reward, Paul was willing to endure any amount of suffering:

Romans 8

18. I consider the sufferings of this present time to be unworthy *of comparison* with the glory that shall be revealed in us.

Philippians 3

8. I consider everything but loss for the surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have accepted the loss of everything, and I consider *it all* garbage, that I might gain Christ,
...
10. and that I might come to know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings – changed to be like him in his death –
11. if by any means I may attain to the resurrection of the dead.

If God's children belonged in this cursed creation, God would not replace it, but such a polluted universe is unworthy of either His Son or His other children. When the resurrected Son ascended to the Father, he did more than ascend into the heavens. He was exalted by the Father "far above all heavens" (Eph. 4:10; Heb. 7:26) because the Father considered His Son to be worthy of greater glory than is found anywhere in this heaven or earth. "No eye has seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered the heart of man the things God has prepared for those who love Him" because the glory waiting for those who are holy as God is holy is nowhere to be found in this doomed creation.²⁷

SECTION 3: NO ONE KNEW

LOVING IGNORANTLY

The disciples loved Jesus, but they were mystified whenever Jesus tried to explain what God was doing in him. Because they only had their kind of life, they could not understand the things of God, no matter how plainly Jesus spoke to them:

Luke 9

44. "Put these words into your ears! The Son of man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men."
- 45a. But they did not understand this statement; indeed, it was hidden from them so that they should not comprehend it.

Luke 18

31. Then he took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything written by the prophets concerning the Son of man will be accomplished.
32. He will be turned over to the Gentiles, and be mocked, and shamefully treated, and spat on.
33. And when they have scourged *him*, they will put him to death. But on the third day, he will rise again."
34. And they understood none of these things, and this saying was hidden from them; neither did they comprehend the things that were spoken.

But Jesus loved them, although he was sometimes exasperated by their ignorance (e.g., Mt. 16:8–11; Mk. 8:21), and he promised them that God's life was coming to them and that when it did, they would understand the things he was telling them:

John 14

25. I have spoken these things to you, being with you,
26. but the comforter, the holy Spirit which the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will bring to your remembrance everything that I have told you.

²⁷ God humbles Himself to even look at what is in heaven (Ps. 113:6), for the heavens themselves "are unclean in His sight" (Job 15:15).

Jesus also promised his disciples that the life they were soon to receive would teach them everything they needed to know:

John 16

13a. When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.

But it was not merely the coming of the Spirit that led the disciples into all truth; it was the coming of the Spirit *into them*. Those who did not love Jesus were not given the Spirit and were not led into all truth. To them, the Spirit's coming was a non-event. God's life had come, but it had not come for them.

Jesus explained that loving him is what leads to receiving God's kind of life:

John 14

21b. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him.

...

23. If anyone loves me, he will obey my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make *our* home with him.

Even in their state of spiritual blindness, the disciples loved Jesus, and Jesus said that others would also love him before they received the Spirit. The reality is that everyone who has ever loved Jesus before receiving God's Spirit has loved him ignorantly because, as with the disciples, no one can truly know him before receiving the Spirit. Everything recorded in the Gospels demonstrates this.

For one example, Peter's human love for Jesus led him to rebuke Jesus for prophesying of his approaching death (Mt. 16:21–22). And later, in the garden of Gethsemane, Peter opposed the work of God by attacking Malchus, one of the men who came to arrest Jesus (Jn. 18:10–11). Both times, Jesus reprovved Peter *for loving him the wrong way!* Peter had rebuked Jesus and attacked Malchus because he loved Jesus and did not want him to be hurt, which is a feeling we cannot condemn. However, his actions were contrary to the will of God because they were motivated by love that sprang from Peter's human kind of life. Jesus' approaching death was God's will, but at the time, Peter did not understand God or His will. He did not have God's kind of life; therefore, he did not have God's kind of love. He and everyone else on earth at the time had only a mind "for the things of men" (Mt. 16:23).

A similar case is that of the multitude who became so enamored of Jesus that they decided to make him king, even though he refused the honor (Jn. 6:15). But they wanted to make him king without understanding what kind of king he already was. To say it another way, they wanted the kind of king that Jesus was not. Without God's kind of life, they were ignorant of God's kind of kingdom, and their earthly concept of a king and their human love of Jesus worked against Jesus, not for him. The day after that adoring multitude would have made Jesus king, his doctrine so displeased them that instead of demanding Jesus be king, many of them turned away "and no longer walked with him" (Jn. 6:66).

If Jesus had yielded to those who wanted to make him king, or if he had accepted Peter's offer to rescue him from the cross, all mankind would have perished. Their human kind of love was as vain in trying to exalt the Son before God's appointed time as was the human hatred of

others in trying to kill the Son before God's appointed time. The kind of death that men dealt to Christ could not hold him (Acts 2:24), and the kind of honor that men offered to Christ could not please him (Jn. 2:23–25).

While Jesus labored among us, the disciples did not know how to love him in a way that would promote God's purpose because no one possessed the Father's kind of love. That would happen only after they received the Father's kind of life, "for the love of God is poured out in our hearts by the holy Spirit which is given to us" (Rom. 5:5b). Paul, the man who wrote that verse, knew by his own past behavior how much damage a devout but misguided man can do when he attempts to love and serve God without God's kind of life. Paul's bitter memory of loving God so zealously with his own kind of love that he participated in putting innocent souls to death inspired him to stress man's desperate need of God's Spirit. He wrote to the saints in Rome,

Romans 8

13. If you live after the flesh [as I once did], you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body [as I am now doing], you will live.
14. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Jesus bluntly warned his disciples that the time would come when men would persecute and even kill them, "thinking to do God service" (Jn. 16:2), and before the life of God was given to Paul and changed Paul's nature, he was one whose life proved that Jesus spoke the truth.

HATING IGNORANTLY

Jesus' disciples were not the only ones who did not know what was happening. Those who despised Jesus did not know, either. The revelation of the existence of the Son of God should have been the happiest moment for the human race since creation, for the existence of the Son revealed truth about God that could have been a great comfort to a world plagued with sin and suffering. Instead, the revelation of the Son provoked outrage from many, especially the leaders of God's own people. Consider this example of how such misguided wrath was stirred up by Jesus' humble confession at his trial:

Mark 14

- 61b. The high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed?"
62. Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."
63. Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "What further need have we of witnesses?"
64. You have heard the blasphemy! What is your decision?" And they all judged him to be worthy of death.

The high priest was wrong. It was not blasphemy for the Son of God to testify that he was the Son of God. However, all that the judges of Israel could see standing before them was the thin, bloodied, and weary son of Mary.

But venomous hatred arose at other times, not only at Jesus' trial, when men were confronted with the revelation of the Son. Here is a scene from early in Jesus' ministry:

John 8

56. [Jesus answered,] “Your father Abraham was overjoyed to see my day, and he saw *it*, and rejoiced.”
57. Then the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham?”
58. Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I tell you, before Abraham came to be, I was.”
- 59a. At this, the Jews took up stones to throw at him.

Such a violent reaction to the revelation of the Son of God seems inexplicable until we remember that everyone then was without God’s life, and no one could understand what God was doing in Jesus. But the worst of all reactions came from Israel’s leaders, for they, like Satan, were proud of their knowledge of and fellowship with God when they really did not have any!²⁸ Little hope remains for those without God’s life who are absolutely confident that they know Him. What need for repentance can such people feel?

Jesus understood fallen man’s awful predicament; the very reason he came was to help us to escape it. In the face of great cruelty, he loved us and refused to become bitter. Unjustly condemned by his kinsmen and crucified by foreigners, Jesus prayed for them all as he suffered on the cross, “Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing” (Lk. 23:34). And when fearful Peter was transformed by God’s life on Pentecost morning, he boldly stood before the Jewish multitude and rebuked them for betraying and killing their Messiah, and yet he judiciously added, “Now, brothers, I know that you did it ignorantly” (Acts 3:17).

Lest we judge those who were guilty of Jesus’ death too harshly, we should keep in mind that until the Spirit came, they were still living in Old Testament time. We have the advantage of reading their story from a perspective that only God had then, knowing who it was that was among them. If we had been in their place and time, what would we have thought or done?

BELIEVING AND CONFESSING IGNORANTLY

John 9

39. Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, so that they may see, who do not see, and so that those who do see might be made blind.”
40. Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard these things, and they said to him, “We are not blind, too, are we?”
41. Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin, but now you say, ‘We see’; therefore, your sin remains.”

It is foolhardy to claim to know God, or even to claim to belong to Him, without possessing His kind of life (Rom. 8:9b). *Anybody who thinks he knows God without having the life that the Son gives has more in common with Satan than he knows.* Satan had nothing but his own cherub-life with which he was created and knew nothing about the Son; still, he was absolutely confident that he knew God. That kind of confidence is the worst kind of blindness.

²⁸ In later chapters, Satan and man’s overconfidence concerning their relationship with God will be closely examined.

When put on trial, the Son of God confessed who he was before the judges of Israel, but still, they did not know him. Seeing only the son of Mary before them, they judged Jesus' confession to be blasphemous *because it was contrary to what they thought they knew*.²⁹ But they were blind to God's Truth, who was standing right before them, because they claimed to already know the truth. "Claiming to be wise," Paul would later say, "they became fools" (Rom. 1:22). Whoever hungers for God's kind of righteousness is blessed because only those who feel their need of God's kind of righteousness will receive it (Mt. 5:6). On the other hand, whoever thinks he is good and wise enough without God's life will remain spiritually blind (Jn. 9:41).

Men's ignorance of God led to misunderstanding the Son, and misunderstanding the Son led to hatred of him. That was one reason Jesus commanded demons to keep silent about him:

Luke 4

34. [The demon said,] "Agh! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the holy one of God!"
 35a. But Jesus rebuked it, saying, "Shut up, and come out of him!"

And later in the same chapter . . .

41. And demons also came out of many, crying aloud, and saying, "You are the Messiah, the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and did not let them speak because they knew him to be the Messiah.

These two scenes seem to suggest that demons knew the Son, but the fact that demons cried out that Jesus was "the holy one", "the Messiah", or even "the Son of God" does not in the least mean that they knew the hidden Son. Everyone in heaven knew that God had caused Mary to conceive a child and that her son was to be the Messiah. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, God's angel proclaimed to some shepherds that the Messiah had been born (Lk. 2:8–11). But the angel did not know the Son; nor did he understand what the word "Messiah" meant *in God's mind*. As for demons, whenever Jesus drew near them, the power of God that was in him moved them to declare things beyond their understanding, just as the power of God had moved Balaam's donkey and Israel's prophets to speak things beyond theirs. The Son of God said very plainly that *no one* knew him except the Father (Mt. 11:27), and we should hold on to that truth regardless of how things appear. Otherwise, we may become confused when we see that certain men or demons of that time spoke as if they did know him. Jesus was never confused:

John 6

68. Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, who will we go to? You have words of eternal life."
 69. And we have believed and are sure that you are the living God's Messiah!"
 70. Jesus answered them, "Didn't I choose you twelve, and one of you is an accuser?"

²⁹ Some in the Trinitarian camp hold what amounts to the same position, for they teach that if the Son is a created being, then he cannot be divine. But why should we think that a God of infinite wisdom and power could not create a divine being, someone to be "the exact representation of His being" (Heb. 1:3)? Gabriel told Mary that nothing is impossible for God (Lk. 1:37), and Jesus, of course, agreed (Mt. 19:26; Mk. 10:27).

It also appears that Peter understood what he was saying at Caesarea Philippi when he exclaimed, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!” (Mt. 16:16). However, moments later, Jesus rebuked Peter sharply, saying, “Get behind me, Satan!” (Mt. 16:23). Peter did not know about the hidden Son of God when he called Jesus the Son of God.³⁰ He called Jesus the Son of God only because, as Jesus immediately said, God had touched Peter (Mt. 16:17). Peter was giving expression to something he felt, not to something he understood.

If we, on this side of Pentecost, impose on the pre-Pentecost disciples or demons a knowledge they did not possess, we miss so much of the story! We know the truth about such terms as “Messiah” and “the Son of God”, but what did those terms mean to Jesus’ disciples? Even after the resurrection, they were expecting the Messiah to reign as an earthly king and to restore Israel’s former glory (Acts 1:6). Many in Israel believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but when they professed faith in Jesus, “he did not trust himself to them because . . . he knew what was in man” (Jn. 2:24–25). More to the point, he knew what was *not* in man – God’s kind of life. Jesus did not trust even his disciples when they claimed to believe in him:

John 16

29. His disciples said to him, “Ah! Now you’re talking plainly and using no figure of speech.
30. We know now that you know everything, and you have no need for anyone to question you; by this, we believe that you came from God.”
31. Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe?”
- 32a. Behold, an hour is coming, and has now come, when you will be scattered, each to his own house, and you will forsake me.”

While he walked on earth, the Son of God had to deal with people who hated him with human hatred, some of whom even said that he was demon-possessed (Jn. 8:52). He also dealt with people who loved him with human love, some of whom even tried to force him to be their king (Jn. 6:15). He dealt with angels who called him Messiah and ministered to him (Lk. 2:11; Mk. 1:13), and he dealt with demons who called him the “Holy One of God” and trembled at his presence (Lk. 4:34). But neither humans, angels, nor demons knew that, from the beginning, there had been a Son of God in heaven who alone possessed God’s kind of life and who had been God’s agent in the creation of all things. While the Son walked on earth, regardless of what anyone said or thought about him, pro or con, nobody really knew what they were talking about because nobody had God’s kind of life.

A perceptive brother, Damien Callaghan, summarized this thought so well that I felt it would be better to quote him than to paraphrase his comments. We must understand, he said, that the universal spiritual ignorance which existed before the day of Pentecost “*allows the seemingly endless contradictions and impossibilities to be true. Every pre-Pentecost event or story that we read about occurred with zero knowledge of what God was doing. To truly understand those stories, there cannot be an ounce of human pride that allows us the thought, ‘Well, they*

³⁰ The Jews commonly referred to their expected Messiah as “the Son of God” (e.g., Jn. 1:49), but only as a term of great respect. They did not know that there had been a Messiah with the Father in heaven from the beginning, waiting to be sent to earth. Whenever demons called Jesus “the Son of God”, they, too, meant “Messiah”, as Luke 4:41, quoted on page 63, clearly shows.

understood something.’ No, they didn’t. Everybody was profoundly ignorant of God as this all worked out. It is breathtaking.” Yes, it is, brother.

When Jesus commanded his disciples not to talk about who he was, he did so because he knew that when they saw him perform miracles, they were likely to say too much in their excitement, especially concerning who they thought he might be (e.g., Mt. 16:15–20; 17:1–9). The Son of God had come to rescue fallen man, and he did not want anyone, whether disciples or demons, to talk much about him, for nobody really knew what to say. Whether they loved him or hated him, they were only loving or hating who they thought he was.

DEAD

Comparing his Father’s kind of life to man’s life, Jesus described all humans as “dead” (Mt. 8:22; Lk. 9:60), for everybody on earth was completely ignorant of and, so, “dead” to the things of God. On the day of Pentecost, however, the Spirit made new and living creatures out of the “dead” followers of Jesus, and as they grew in grace, the disciples began to sound like Jesus, proclaiming truth which, before Pentecost, had come only from the Master’s lips:

John 1

18. No one has ever understood God; the only begotten Son who is next to the Father has made Him known.

The Son alone could reveal the Father’s hidden thoughts and ways because the Son was the only one who knew Him. Jesus said, “No one really knows the Son except the Father, and no one really knows the Father except the Son, and him to whom the Son will reveal *Him*” (Mt. 11:27), and when attacked for confessing that truth, the meek Son of God replied to his adversaries, “If I say that I do not know Him, I will be a liar like you!” (Jn. 8:55). Until the Son was revealed, no one even knew that God *was* a Father, except in a rhetorical sense (Dt. 32:6; Pss. 68:5; 103:13; Mal. 1:6; Jn. 8:41b, etc.), and without knowing that God was a real Father, with a real Son, it was impossible to truly know Him.

This means that Abraham, “God’s friend” (Jas. 2:23; 2Chron. 20:7), did not really know his Friend and that David, “a man after God’s own heart” (1Sam. 13:14), did not know the God whose heart his was like. Moses often conversed with God as friend would speak with friend (Ex. 33:11), but Moses did not know the One who spoke to him. Daniel, “greatly loved” by God (Dan. 9:23), did not know the God by whom he was loved, and Isaiah, who saw the LORD in His temple, “high and lifted up”, did not know the God he saw. They were all dead to the God they served.

TRUTH JESUS COULD NOT TELL

The night before he died, Jesus gathered with his beloved disciples for his final Passover meal and spoke with them of many things, but there were some truths so foreign to humans that Jesus could not speak of them, not even to his disciples who had been with him for so long. God’s ways and God’s thoughts are so foreign to humans that they can frighten people and trouble their spirits, and Jesus loved his disciples too much to put that burden on them. He told them, “I still have many things to tell you, but you are not able to bear them now” (Jn. 16:12).

Jesus tried to comfort his disciples by telling them that when the Spirit came, it would bring to their remembrance everything he had told them and would guide them “into all truth” (Jn. 14:26; 16:13), but they could not understand that, either. Paul, loving God’s people as Jesus did, also held truth back from saints who were spiritually immature (1Cor. 3:1–2), and he told them that people using their ordinary human minds cannot comprehend the things of God and that they often refuse holy things as foolishness (1Cor. 2:12–14). Only by receiving God’s kind of life and developing what Paul called “the mind of Christ” (1Cor. 2:16) can anyone understand the things of God.

God is not human, and there is nothing human about Him. The Son, created as “the exact representation of God’s being”, was also as fully divine and was not the least bit human, either – until he came to earth and blended with Mary’s fully human son. That blending of God’s Son with Mary’s son resulted in the creation of a second Adam (1Cor. 15:45), the first of new kind of man, and those who receive God’s life become the new creatures of which Jesus was the first. Having been “born of God”, they are no longer mere humans, for they are now children of God, partakers of His divine nature (2Pet. 1:4). In Christ, and by the Spirit, God has created a family for Himself, and His family is like Him in at least this respect: it is not human! This was John’s meaning when he wrote, “as He is, so are we in this world” (1Jn. 4:17). Before receiving God’s kind of life, John would have considered such a statement to be blasphemous. After Pentecost, John himself wrote it!

Referring to the coming of the Spirit, Jesus told his wondering disciples that “on that day, you will know for yourselves” (Jn. 14:20). Until then, however, Jesus could only tell them that something glorious was coming, and he labored constantly to persuade them of it so that they would be present when God sent it. It was impossible for the disciples to comprehend the kind of life they were about to receive or how much it would change them. Here are some of the things Jesus could not tell his disciples at that time:

- The law of Moses, which the disciples and all the upright in Israel loved, would soon be fulfilled and brought to its intended end.³¹
- God would soon welcome the Gentiles into His kingdom without them being circumcised, as Moses’ law required.
- After his experience at the Jordan River, Jesus was neither Jew nor Gentile. The son of Mary was as much a Jew as the disciples were, but the Son of God was not, and neither was the new creature that Jesus became that day.
- Jesus did not belong here in this world. He fit in with humans not much more than he did with plants and animals. If he had told his disciples that truth while they were still merely human, they would have agreed with Jesus’ earthly relatives and adversaries that he was deranged.
- After they received the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the disciples themselves would not be human, either, but would be citizens of a heavenly country, and foreigners to this world of sinners.

³¹ The law of Moses was not destroyed (Mt. 5:17); it was made spiritual. Jesus brought the law to an end physically, by “nailing it to the cross” (Col. 2:14), but he established it as a spiritual law. See Chapters 2–4 in my book, *Spiritual Light*, available for online reading at GoingtoJesus.com.

As I said previously, the spiritual condition of Jesus' disciples until the day of Pentecost was that they loved the Father and the Son but did not really know either of them.³² The same is true of sincere followers of Jesus today who have not yet experienced their own Pentecost.

GROWING IN KNOWLEDGE

Even with God's kind of life, Jesus' disciples were greatly challenged by the truth into which the Spirit wanted to lead them, for it led them into places they never dreamed they would be asked to go. Peter would never have gone to Cornelius' house if the Spirit had not compelled him to do so (Acts 10:9–20). Nor would Paul ever have gone to the Gentiles with a gospel different from Peter's if the Spirit had not taken him into the third heaven and revealed truth to him that was "unlawful for a man to speak" (2Cor. 12:2–4). When he said, "I am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that nothing in itself is unclean" (Rom. 14:14), Paul was teaching doctrine that he previously would have condemned as heresy – and he would have endorsed the execution of anyone in Israel who taught it! *God's life has the power to lead believers into truth which they would otherwise condemn.* God's thoughts really are not our thoughts, and His ways really are not our ways, and it is only as we humble ourselves to His thoughts and His ways that we can grow in grace and knowledge after we receive His kind of life.

Even with God's kind of life, we must grow in the knowledge of our Father (2Pet. 3:18; Col. 1:10). My father taught us that receiving the Spirit of God is like being in the first day of school in God's kingdom and that the day we are born of God, we know our heavenly Father no better than we knew our earthly fathers the day we were born on earth. If we do not grow in the knowledge of God after receiving His Spirit, we end up among those in the family of God whom Paul called feeble-minded (1Thess. 5:14).

As children of God whom the Son has set free, we are, of course, free to refuse to grow in the knowledge that God's life offers us, but it is foolish to do so. Jesus said that everyone who seeks the kingdom of God would find it, but he did not say that everyone who finds it would like what they find – and if after we receive God's life, we remain attached to former ways, we may very well not like it. Peter could have clung to his respect for the "traditions of the elders" and refused to go to Cornelius' house, but he knew that the word of God that came to him trumped everything else, and he was humble enough to obey the Voice. Paul could have argued that the gospel revealed to him was contrary to the law, clung to the law instead, and refused to face the danger of preaching his new gospel for the Gentiles. However, Paul valued his revelation too much to do that, and he considered all that he believed before to be nothing but garbage in comparison (Phip. 3:7–8). It would have been unwise for Peter or Paul not to obey the word of God that came to them, but they were free to refuse it, and both of them could have come up with biblical reasons not to follow the Spirit into the truth to which it was leading them. It was not God's grace alone that made them what they became; it was their courageous response of faith to God's grace that enabled them to grow into the mighty men of God that they became. Grace alone does not save us. There must be a response of faith.³³ That is why Paul taught that we are "saved by grace, through faith" (Eph. 2:8), not by either grace or faith alone. It takes both.

³²For more on this, see "The Spiritual Condition of the Disciples before Pentecost" in the Appendix.

³³ For more on this, see my tract, "The Way of Grace", available for online reading at GoingtoJesus.com.

“THE THOUGHTS OF MANY HEARTS”

Some people hated the revelation of the Son so much that they chose to kill the servants of God who proclaimed that message rather than to receive it. Others loved that revelation so much that they chose to suffer and die rather than to deny it. What was it that provoked some to kill in order to silence those who believed in the Son, while others considered it an honor to die for believing in him? The answer lies hidden in men’s hearts, and only God can either see or expose it. None of us can know ourselves or what is in our hearts until we meet the real Son of God. It is only his light that enables us to rightly see ourselves or anything else.

When the infant Jesus was brought by his parents to the temple to be circumcised, an old prophet named Simeon was waiting for them. The Spirit had sent him that day to see the child whom God had ordained to be the Messiah, and when the godly old man took the infant from the arms of its mother, what he told her about her child and herself must have given her pause:

Luke 2

- 34b. Behold, this *child* is appointed for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign spoken against –
- 35. [then, to Mary] a sword shall pierce even your soul! – so that the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed.

Whenever God’s servants bring the light of God’s Son into the arena of human society, those who sincerely desire truth and goodness rejoice at the light, and they honor God’s messengers. Those who do not sincerely desire truth and goodness do not embrace the light, and they persecute God’s messengers. As the following verses from the Last Supper show, Jesus labored to prepare his beloved disciples for the cruelty and hatred they would face after they began to live as sons of God in this wicked world:

John 15

- 18. If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before *it hated* you.
- 19. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world – on the contrary, I have chosen you out of the world – the world hates you.
- 20. Remember the statement that I made to you: “A servant is not greater than his master.” If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they have obeyed my word, they will also obey yours.

Being like his Father, the Son was in danger on earth, for his sinless presence exposed hearts, and wicked people do not like that. A thousand years before he came, the Son foretold of this danger when he spoke to his Father through David, saying, “The insults of those who would insult you fell on me” (Ps. 69:9). But the opposite was also true. The love of those who truly loved God also fell on the Son when he came to earth. The light that the Son brought “shed light on all men” (Jn. 1:9) so that their true feelings and thoughts about God were exposed, even if they tried to hide them. Because the Son walked among us as the perfect reflection of God’s being (Heb. 1:3), it was impossible for those who hated God to hide their hatred of the Son, and likewise, it was impossible for those who loved God to hide their love for the Son, even if they did not understand him and even if sometimes they inadvertently got in his way.

The same holds true now. Anyone who now walks in God's life reflects His nature among men, and when God's nature is manifested among men, it brings out what is really in their hearts, whether it be good or bad. That is an inescapable fact of spiritual life. When the light of God's life shines in us, we know by people's reaction to us whether they love God or not.³⁴

Even though righteous people who lived before Pentecost knew nothing of the Son, the love they demonstrated for the law and the prophets was an expression of love for the Son, for the law and prophets spoke of him. Jesus told the rulers of the Jews,

John 5

46. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me.

47. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?

Moses was reared in the sumptuousness of Pharaoh's palace, but he chose to associate himself with the downtrodden people of God rather than to enjoy the advantages of his status as an Egyptian prince. Moses' high regard for God's people is described in the New Testament as Moses "esteeming the reproach of Christ *to be* greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt" (Heb. 11:26). But Moses knew nothing of Christ! He truly loved God and His people; therefore, he loved the Son, although he knew nothing of him.

One cannot love either the Father or the Son without loving the other; they are too much alike for it to be any other way. The unveiling of the Son brought all things to light, even the secret thoughts of men's hearts, and there is nowhere for anyone to hide. Because the Son is a perfect Son, just as God is a perfect Father, a person's response to the Son reveals his heart's real attitude toward God. And the Son is so great that people cannot refuse to respond, even if they do not want to. This is true at all times and places, whenever and wherever the light of the Son shines.



³⁴ More on this subject in Chapter 9.

Part 2

Concealing and Revealing



Chapter 3

“A Revealer of Secrets”

There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets.
Daniel 2:28a

The secret things belong to the LORD our God,
but things that are revealed belong to us
and to our children forever.
Deuteronomy 29:29a

GOD’S GLORY

Solomon said, “It is the glory of God to conceal a thing” (Prov. 25:2), but it is also true that it is the glory of God to reveal a thing. God has covered Himself with both the glory of hidden truth and the glory of revelation. Hardly a chapter can be found in the Bible that does not in some way demonstrate that, from the beginning, God’s way has been to conceal and to reveal all things in His time. God hides things from every creature, even from His Son (e.g., Mk. 13:32). At this very moment, He is hiding a multitude of things from each of us, and He is doing it for our good as well as for His glory.

Here are just a few of the many scriptures that declare God to be a God who conceals and reveals:

Psalm 25

14. The secret of the LORD is for those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.

Isaiah 45

15. O God of Israel, Savior, you truly are a God who hides Himself.

Jeremiah 33

3. Call upon me, and I will answer you, and I will show you great, inaccessible things that you do not know.

Daniel 2

27. Daniel answered in the presence of the king and said, “The wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, and the soothsayers cannot reveal to the king the secret which the king has demanded,

...

29b. but He who reveals secrets is making known to you what shall come to pass.”

...

47. The king answered Daniel and said, “Truly, your³⁵ God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing you could reveal this secret.”

Sometimes, when Jesus thought on the suffering that lay in store for those whose hearts were blinded by the Father, he wept over them (Lk. 19:41–44). At other times, when he thought about how his Father had blinded the proud, Jesus could hardly contain his joy:

Luke 10 (cp. Mt. 11:25–26)

21. In that same hour, Jesus rejoiced in spirit and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the learned and intelligent, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for *doing it* that way pleases you!”

God is good to condescend to reveal Himself to whomever He chooses, but He is just as good when He hides Himself. Jesus rejoiced in all of it because he trusted his Father’s choices.

GOD’S CHOICE

When men hide things, they put them out of sight, but when God hides things, He lays them out in full view and then does not allow those looking on to understand what they see. We all have experienced this, whether we realize it or not. We all have been among those who “seeing, do not see, and hearing, do not hear” (Mt. 13:13). Even Jesus’ disciples, after seeing him feed a multitude with a few loaves and fish, worried about having enough food:

Mark 8

17a. When Jesus knew it, he said to them, “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you not yet know, nor understand?”

18. Having eyes, do you not see? Having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember?”

The heavens are seen around the world (Ps. 19:3–4); they cannot be hidden. Or can they? One man looks at the stars and says, “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1), while another looks at them and “says in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Ps. 14:1). What makes the difference? The Bible is consistent with its answer: God has opened the eyes of the first, but He has blinded the eyes of the second. It cannot be a matter of intelligence, for, as a rule, the

³⁵ Since the “your” here is plural, we know that Nebuchadnezzar was speaking of the God of all the Jews, not just of Daniel.

ungodly in this world are more intelligent than God's children, as both Jesus and Paul admitted (Lk. 16:8; 1Cor. 1:26–27). Saints and sinners alike see the heavens, but only those whose hearts are touched by God have the kind of wisdom that enables them to really see what they are looking at.

Jesus often spoke to the multitudes in parables that contained hidden lessons concerning God's kind of life, thus fulfilling what the Son promised through the prophet that he would do:

Psalm 78 (cp. Mt. 13:34–35)

2. I will open my mouth with a parable; I will pour out dark sayings of old.

Jesus' disciples, seeing that no one was understanding his parables, asked him why he spoke in parables to the people. His answer was both terrifying and glorious:

Matthew 13

11. He answered and said to them, "To you it is given to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.

...

14. In them is Isaiah's prophecy fulfilled, which says, 'You will indeed hear, but you will by no means understand, and you will indeed see, but you will by no means perceive.'"

That is a terrifying answer for those to whom "it is not given", but it is a glorious answer for those to whom "it is given". It is God's choice alone whether to shine His light into our hearts or to leave us in our darkness. Human willpower, ability, and effort cannot make it happen. This truth gives us reason to both love and fear God, as Jesus did (Heb. 5:7; Jn. 14:31). God alone decides who will see and who will not see, and who can demand an account from Him for His choices? He is advised by no one, and He answers to no one. In creation, He did only what it pleased Him to do (Ps. 135:6), and in each of our lives, He does the same. It is the nature of man to question the justice of that, but Paul responded to that worthless human wisdom:

Romans 9

14. What shall we say, then? Is there injustice with God? Absolutely not!

15. For He says to Moses, "I will show mercy to whomever I show mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I have compassion."

16. So then, *it is* not of him who wants *it*, nor of him who strives *for it*, but of God who shows mercy.

17. For the scripture says to Pharaoh, "This is the very reason I raised you up, so that in you, I might demonstrate my power, and my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

18. Therefore, to whom He will, He shows mercy, and whom He will, He hardens.

19. You will say to me, then, "Why does He yet find fault? For who has resisted His will?"

20. But hold on, O man. Who are you who talks back at God? Will the thing shaped say to Him who shaped it, "Why did you make me like this?"

21. Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

Paul said his mission was to proclaim to the Gentiles the once-hidden mystery of the Son and to lead them to him (Eph. 3:8–9). Though many rejected his message, Paul remained encouraged because he knew that every person who hungers and thirsts for God’s righteousness will be filled with it, as Jesus promised in his Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:6), for the hungering and thirsting itself, not just the righteousness, comes from God. This is the critical point: the desire to come to Christ is itself a gift from God, as Jesus plainly taught:

John 6

44a. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

The earliest believers understood this. For example, when the Gentiles first received the life of God, the elders in the Jewish community of faith said, “God has granted repentance unto life to the Gentiles” (Acts 11:18). They understood that if God had given His Spirit to the Gentiles, then He must have also granted them the repentance required to receive it.

Paul concluded that “if our gospel is hidden, it is hidden from those who are lost” (2Cor. 4:3). In other words, if people reject the gospel, it can only be that God, for whatever reason, has rejected them and hidden the gospel from them. And in such cases, believers can do nothing but pray that the Father will have mercy on those who are lost in sin, and then continue to live so as to show them the way.

CONCEALING AND REVEALING HIMSELF

Isaiah was right to say that God hides Himself (Isa. 45:15). But just as when He hides other things, when God hides Himself, He does not crouch behind a rock or crawl under a bed, the way we humans hide ourselves. When God hides Himself, it is only that He refuses to allow men to find Him, “although He is not far from any one of us” (Acts 17:27). Job was one who understood that God does not go anywhere when He is hidden. Job desperately searched for God but could not find Him; still, he knew that God was close by, watching everything that was happening:

Job 23

8. I go forward, but He is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him;
 9. on the left hand, where He is working, but I cannot behold Him. He is hiding Himself on the right hand so that I cannot see Him.
 10a. Still, He knows how it is with me.

In the Old Testament, whenever God did not bless or protect someone, it was said that God had “hidden His face” from him, and Job felt the helplessness of having God hide His face:

Job 34

29. When He orders peace, who can make trouble? And when He hides His face, who can see Him, whether it *be done to* a nation or a single man?

On the other hand, when God blessed and protected a person, it was said that God's face was shining on him. This is why the high priest's blessing of Israel concerned itself mostly with God's face being turned toward Israel:

Numbers 6

24. The LORD bless you and keep you!
25. The LORD make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you!
26. The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace!

The greatest expression of God's countenance shining on man was when He sent His Son to rescue us from sin and death. This is why Paul spoke of the revelation of the Son as he did:

2Corinthians 4

6. The God who commanded light to shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts, to give *us* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Regardless of how brightly God's face shined on anyone before the Son brought God's life to men, God's true character remained unknown to them. If those who now have God's life within them only "know in part" (1Cor. 13:12), then those who lived before the Spirit was given did not know at all – but not only they, for until the Son of God was revealed, angels also had no knowledge of God. Even now, after the Son has been revealed, the angels still do not possess the knowledge of God that believers possess because they still do not possess God's kind of life. "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God" has not shone in their hearts, and it never will because God chose to bless humans, not angels, with His kind of life.

CONCEALING AND REVEALING THE SON

It is astonishing enough to learn that from the foundation of the world, God had kept all men, even the wisest and holiest of them, from knowing about His Son. However, the additional revelation that heavenly beings were also kept from knowing about the Son challenges some common perceptions about life in heaven. The revelation of the Son included the unexpected information that no creature anywhere knew about the Son until God's appointed time came:

Ephesians 3

3. By revelation, the mystery was made known to me, as I also briefly wrote before,
4. concerning which you are able, as you read, to perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ,
5. which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men as it is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.
...
8. To me, the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach among the Gentiles the incomprehensible richness of Christ
9. and to enlighten all men as to what is the plan of the mystery that has been hidden from the Aeons by God, who created all things through Jesus Christ.

The Greek word *aeon* can refer to a long period of time, but in that passage from Ephesians, it clearly refers to spiritual beings.³⁶ Paul's thought concerning these Aeons is continued in the next verse from Ephesians 3, and it reveals that they learn of God's wisdom by watching the people who possess God's kind of life:

10. So that through the Assembly *of God*, the multi-faceted wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities among heavenly beings,
11. according to the eternal purpose which He fulfilled in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Notice that in verse 10, Paul made the stunning statement that the Aeons actually learn of the mystery of Christ *through God's chosen people*.³⁷ This is in harmony with what Peter said concerning angels; to wit, that the angels, being ignorant of our life in Christ, are very curious about it:

1Peter 1

- 12b. [The prophets prophesied of] things which have now been reported to you by those who preach the gospel to you by the holy Spirit sent from heaven, into which things the angels long to look.

It is a remarkable concept, that those who walk in the life of God are living revelations of the Son to heavenly beings as well as to people on earth! Nevertheless, it is a doctrine that Paul was sure of, and he repeated in his letter to the saints at Colossae:

Colossians 1

25. I was made a servant *of God* by a divine commission, given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God,
26. the mystery hidden from the Aeons and from generations *of man*, but now revealed to His saints,
27. by whom God has willed to make known among the Gentiles what *is* the richness of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

So, even the creatures of heaven were kept in the dark about the Son until "the fullness of time", when the Father shared His life with men and revealed His Son. This must be why Paul made the arresting statement that the Son (here called "God") was seen by angels only when humans saw him; that is, when the Son took on a visible, earthly body:

1Timothy 3

16. Undeniably, the mystery of godliness is great: God was made manifest in the flesh, was justified by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the Gentiles, was believed on in the world, and was taken up into glory.

³⁶ For an extra-biblical example of this meaning for *Aeon*, we have an early Christian funerary inscription, the "Flavia Sophe Inscription", which declares that the departed woman desired to look upon the faces of the Aeons.

³⁷ It must be that the Aeons learn by observing the Assembly of God; nothing is said about God's people orally teaching spiritual beings.

If the angels had seen and known the Son in heaven since creation, Paul would not have told Timothy that the Son “was seen by angels” after he was “manifest in the flesh”. But if the Son began to be revealed when he took on a fleshly body, then what Paul said makes sense. Furthermore, when men and angels saw the Son, they began to truly see the Father (Jn. 14:9).

WHERE THE SON WAS FIRST REVEALED

When “the fullness of time” came, the Father did not summon the multitudes of heavenly beings and somberly announce, “It is now time for me to tell you all something important that I have kept hidden from you from the beginning.” Instead, in His great wisdom, He chose to reveal the existence of His Son on earth, to men.

John the Baptist was chosen to introduce the Son, and that alone made John so great that no other in human history was greater than he (Mt. 11:11; Lk. 7:28). But being ignorant of the Son, John did not know whom to introduce. God had to give him a sign to look for – a dove that would descend from heaven and light upon the one chosen to be the Messiah. Later, Jesus came to John to be baptized, and when the meek son of Mary came up out of the Jordan, John saw the sign that God had given him. When he heard God’s voice speak from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” John cried out,

John 1

32. I saw the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and it remained on him.
33. And I did not know him, but the One who sent me to baptize with water told me, “Upon whomever you see the Spirit descend and remain on him, the same is he who baptizes with holy Spirit.”
34. And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God!³⁸

John’s baptism was not an introduction to baptism; it was an introduction to Christ, the Baptizer who would follow John (Jn. 1:30–31). Likewise, the Father’s voice that came out of heaven at Jesus’ baptism was not an introduction to Jesus. Jesus had already been introduced to men by angels singing and praising God in the night sky above Bethlehem as they announced the birth of Mary’s son. The Father’s voice at the Jordan River was an introduction to *His* Son, not Mary’s, and He was speaking to man, not angels.

THE HIDDEN SON IN HEAVEN

The controlling factor in all of life, whether in heaven or on earth, or anywhere else, is that God hides everything until He determines to reveal it. Only with that knowledge can we perceive how it could have been that from the beginning, the Son dwelt with the Father in heaven without angels knowing who the Son was. But then, that is exactly what happened to a couple of Jesus’ disciples after Jesus rose from the dead:

³⁸ We must remember that John was a prophet speaking by the Spirit. He knew nothing about the pre-existent Son of God. As has been noted, the term “Son of God” was used by Jews as a term of respect for an especially anointed man, the Messiah, not as an acknowledgement of the Son’s pre-existence with the Father. The sect that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, though saying that God would beget, or father, the Messiah (1Q28a, Col. 2:11–12), still spoke of the Messiah only as a man.

Luke 24

15. And it came to pass that while they talked and reasoned together, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them.
16. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

It is difficult for us on this side of Pentecost to imagine the Son of God being anywhere without being known because we picture him as the glorified Lord of heaven whom John saw:

Revelation 1

13. In the midst of the seven lampstands was *one* like a son of man, wearing a robe extending to his feet and girded about the chest with a golden sash.
14. His head and his hair *were* white as wool, like snow, and his eyes *were* like a flame of fire,
15. and his feet *were* like fine brass glowing in a furnace, and his voice *was* like the sound of many waters.

Whether or not the Son shone in heaven from the foundation of the world the way John saw him shine in Revelation is completely irrelevant. God's will was all that mattered, and until He sent His Son to earth, it was not His will that anyone should know him. The Son may have dwelt among heaven's inhabitants as a gloriously beautiful creature, but then, he may have dwelt among them as a rather ordinary-looking being. That is certainly how it was for the Son on earth, for the human body that the Father prepared for him was both unattractive and awkward (Isa. 53:2–3). Whether he dwelt among the angels in unmatched majesty or he was not seen by them at all, the reason the Son was unknown to them, and the only reason, is that the Father did not allow them to know him. The Son was hidden whether he was seen or not seen. God had determined to keep His Son a secret, and the Son's visibility in heaven was, therefore, of no consequence whatsoever. The Father's Son was the Father's secret, and until He revealed His secret, that is all there was to the matter.

CONCEALING ANGELS

God hides His angels. God is hiding angels (and other spiritual beings, good and evil) from our eyes this very moment. His angels are always near, watching over us, but we see them only when He allows us to see them. Jesus taught that those who are newly born of God have angels that are especially attentive to the Father for their sakes:

Matthew 18

10. See to it that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that in heaven, their angels are always watching the face of my Father who is in heaven.

Unseen angels from God are stationed around all who fear Him, to protect them:

Psalm 34

7. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them.

If our heavenly Father were a "publicity hound", He would let us know about all the trouble from which His protecting angels save us. But our Father, as Jesus demonstrated, is "meek and

lowly”. He hides from us not only His protecting angels but also most of what those angels protect us from. I suspect that what we are saved from daily would overwhelm us if we knew about it. Besides, we have plenty to praise God for without knowing everything He is doing for us.

It may be that God keeps certain angels, or information about them, hidden from other angels as well as from men. After all, Jesus told John in Revelation that those who are saved in the end will be given a stone with a secret name on it, a name that no one will know except the one to whom the stone is given (Rev. 2:17). Both Michael and Gabriel were allowed to reveal their names (Dan. 10:13, 21; Lk. 1:19, 26), and the angel named Abaddon is mentioned in Revelation 9:11. But of the myriads of angels that exist, they are the only three whose names have been revealed.³⁹ The rest, as far as we are told, are like the angel who visited Manoah, who refused to divulge his name:

Judges 13

17. And Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, “What is your name, so that when your sayings come to pass, we may do you honor?”
18. And the angel of the LORD said to him, “Why do you ask for my name, seeing it is secret?”

Even if God opens our eyes to see an angel, He must still reveal to us that it is an angel that we see. Angels do not have wings. They look human and are generally the size of humans (Rev. 21:17). Because God does not always reveal to us that angels are in our presence, “some have unwittingly entertained angels” (Heb. 13:2), and I suspect this happens more than any of us know.

CONCEALING THE SAINTS

God hides His people. He can hide them physically, as when He physically carried the young priest Ezekiel from Babylon to Jerusalem to let him observe the wickedness of his fellow Jews. God did not allow anyone in Jerusalem to see Ezekiel standing in their midst, watching their idolatrous activities (Ezek. 8–11). God also hid Jeremiah and his scribe, Baruch, when wicked King Jehoiakim wanted to arrest them (Jer. 36:26). And several times, God hid Jesus from outraged mobs who were determined to kill him before the appointed time. The first instance took place after Jesus’ first and only sermon in his hometown of Nazareth:

Luke 4

28. When they heard these things, everybody in the synagogue was filled with rage,
29. and they rose up and drove him out of the city, and they led him to the brow of the mountain on which the city was built, to throw him off the cliff.
30. But he passed through their midst, and went away.

³⁹ These are the only three angel names revealed in Scripture (Apocrypha excepted). Satan’s name has also been revealed, of course, but as I said before, he is not an angel. He is a cherub, the only cherub given a name in the Bible.

Beyond this, God hides His children spiritually. They are now kings and priests in the kingdom of God (Rev. 1:6), but the world does not and cannot recognize them as such. Paul longed for the day when the identity of God's children would be revealed (Rom. 8:19); that is, for them to take their place in God's order and reign on earth with the Son. The apostle John spoke of God's children being hidden from the world and of the coming manifestation of the children of God:

1John 3

2. We are now children of God, but what we shall be is not yet made manifest. But we know that when it is made manifest, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

The world does not know the children of God because the world does not know God (1Jn. 3:1). The saints are God's "hidden ones" (Ps. 83:3), and their lives are "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). Anyone not hidden with God's saints in the "secret place of the Most High" (Ps. 91:1) cannot find them, for under God's wing, they are kept safe from the hateful designs of the world:

Psalm 31

20. You will hide them in the secret of your presence from the schemes of man; you will keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.

David called God "my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower" (Ps. 18:2), "my strong habitation, to which I continually resort" (Ps. 71:3), "my high tower and refuge" (Ps. 59:16), and "my hiding place and my shield" (Ps. 119:114). The world, including most of God's own people, did not understand David's relationship with God, especially as it existed after God forgave David of adultery and murder. Nevertheless, to know where to go to be hidden from sin and death is great wisdom, and David had it.

CONCEALING THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SAINTS

God hides our communion. Our heavenly Father has so completely hidden the invisible, spiritual connection between Himself and His children that its very existence is denied by the world; nevertheless, it is real, and it is sweet. The term "mystery" is repeatedly used in the New Testament as a reference to the life that God shares with us who love His Son. Jesus spoke of "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 13:11), John wrote of "the mystery of God" (Rev. 10:7), and Paul mentioned "the mystery of God's will" (Eph. 1:9), "the mystery of the gospel" (Eph. 6:19), "the mystery of Christ" (Col. 4:3), "the mystery of the faith" (1Tim. 3:9), and "the mystery of godliness" (1Tim. 3:16). Everything about the holy life we share with our Father is a mystery to creatures who do not have God's kind of life, whether plants, animals, angels, or men.

Paul described God's blinding of men's souls as a veil laid over their hearts, a veil which only Christ can remove (2Cor. 3:14–15). Just the thought that God might exclude us from the fellowship of His life is terrifying, but it is a daily reality for millions on earth as they plod along, knowing nothing of the holy life they are missing. Men without God are "like the beasts that perish" (Ps. 49:12, 20), completely ignorant of God's kind of life and devoid of desire for it. But

fellowship with the Father and the Son holds so much promise and provides so many benefits that the dearest hope of the apostles was that the saints would enjoy that holy, spiritual harmony to the fullest extent:

Philippians 2

1. If *there is* any comfort in Christ, if any solace of love, if any fellowship in spirit, if any tender affections and mercies,
2. make my joy complete, that you think the same thing, having the same love, as united souls, thinking one thing.

1Corinthians 1

10. I urge you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in the same mind and in the same judgment.

1John 1

3. That which we have seen and heard, we are showing you so that you may also have fellowship with us, and our fellowship truly *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Fellowship with the Father and the Son means to feel their feelings and to think their thoughts. It is to understand God and to agree with Him. And it is the desire of every true man of God for God's children to walk together in that blessed harmony. Oh, that we all would do our part and forsake our old ways completely and serve God in perfect harmony so that others might see the light of Christ in us! Let us pray for that, and for the Father to touch the hearts of those around us so that they might desire the light that they see. Men crucified the only one who could have revealed the hidden fellowship of God to them because they did not want it. None of us did, until God touched our hearts and called us into His grace.

This unbelieving world is scornful of the notion that such harmony is possible. God has hidden it from the world, but the heart of God is that His children show the world by their deeds that such love and unity is real. This is, in fact, the very thing for which Jesus prayed after his Last Supper with his disciples (Jn. 17:20–23). One of God's purposes for giving us His Spirit is to enable us to serve Him together as one (Zeph. 3:9), thereby providing the world with a powerful testimony to His Son Jesus. The fact that the children of God are divided and, therefore, cannot serve Him together as one is something the world must see as a testimony against Jesus. It certainly is a great reproach on his name.

The disunity of God's New Testament family on earth may be the greatest tragedy in history, even surpassing the tragedy of the original fall in the garden of Eden. In that first case of sin, Adam and Eve did not have God's kind of life within them to teach and guide them. What excuse can we who have God's life offer for our divisions? It is disgraceful. Moreover, we are all less than we could be in Christ because of it, and only God knows how much less. If we are wise, we will do as the Spirit advised and mingle our worship with fear (Ps. 2:11), lest on the Day of Judgment, God find us responsible for the divisions that exist among His children. Somebody is going to answer to God for it.

We should note that even though Jesus said that unity among believers would help the world to believe in him (Jn. 17:23), that truth does not deny the Father's determining role in souls coming to believe in the Son (Jn. 6:44). The Father will use the unity of His people to convict sinners of their need of Him, but He still must create the desire within those sinners for fellowship with Him, no matter what they see. Even if all God's children walk perfectly together in the Spirit, sinners cannot desire the saints' sweet, mysterious fellowship with the Father and the Son unless the Father touches their hearts.





Chapter 4

The Son in the Old Testament

Their minds were blinded, and even until this very day,
 in the reading of the Old Testament, the same veil remains,
 not taken away because it is removed in Christ.
 Yes, to this day, whenever Moses is read,
 a veil lies over their heart,
 but if *their heart* ever turns to the Lord,
 the veil will be lifted off.
 2Corinthians 3:14–16

“SINCE THE WORLD BEGAN”

The ten chapters of Isaiah 40–49 are filled with pleas to God’s chosen people to forsake the worship of heathen gods and to understand the difference between them and the true God. In those chapters, Isaiah emphasizes God as Creator, and one of the most distinctive differences between the Creator and the gods of the Gentiles was that the Creator told of things to come, far in advance. God pleaded with Israel to consider this great difference between Him and the other gods they were worshipping:

Isaiah 46

- 9b. I am God! And there are no other gods. There is none like me,
- 10a. who makes the end known from the beginning, and *makes known* from ancient time what has not yet happened.

Isaiah 48

- 3. I declared the former things before they happened. Out of my mouth, they came, and I made them hear *it*. I acted suddenly, and those things happened.
- 4. Knowing that you are stubborn, and that your neck is sinew of iron, and that your brow is brass,
- 5. I told you ahead of time. Before it took place, I made you hear *of it*, lest you should say, “My idol did those things,” or “My graven image and my molten image ordained them.”

Isaiah mocked the gods that most of his fellow Israelites were worshipping, and he challenged those gods to tell what would happen in the future, the way the true God did:

Isaiah 41

23a. Tell what is coming in the future, and let us know that you are gods!

But even in Isaiah's time, God was not finished telling His people of things to come. As He pointed out the many events that He had previously foretold and that had come to pass, He let Israel know, through the prophets of their time, that He was still telling of events yet to take place:

Isaiah 48

6b. Even now, I am causing you to hear new things, even hidden things that you do not know!

Even in this verse, as the Reader will later see, God was revealing something about His Son that would remain hidden until His Son was revealed. Now, thankfully, God wants us to know how completely He described His Son, even many centuries before the Son actually came. And when our eyes are opened to all that the ancient prophets said about the Son, we can only stand in awe of our heavenly Father's wisdom and power.

Solomon made the observation that "a wise man's eyes are in his head" (Eccl. 2:14), and to that observation one might respond, "Well, of course they are." But Solomon was speaking spiritually, his point being that a wise man is one who really sees what he sees; that is, God has given him the ability to understand what he is looking at. This is true wisdom, and the coming of the Spirit is what put the disciples' eyes in their heads concerning the Father and the Son. Their "veil" of ignorance began to be removed from their hearts when they received God's life at Pentecost.

The same day Jesus rose from the dead, he approached two of his disciples walking along the road from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus, but they did not recognize him, even when he asked them why they were sad. They told him they were sad because they had thought Jesus was the Messiah, but the Romans had executed him. Then they told him that certain women they knew were now claiming to have seen Jesus alive again. They were confused and troubled; however, the Lord showed them no sympathy:

Luke 24

25. He said to them, "*You* fools, and slow in heart to believe everything spoken by the prophets!
26. Didn't Christ have to suffer these things and enter into his glory?"
27. And then, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he began explaining to them things concerning himself in all the scriptures.

Not long afterward, in one of Peter's first sermons as a born-again man, he also referred to the prophets' ancient testimonies when speaking of the risen Messiah:

Acts 3

21. [Jesus] whom heaven must receive until the time for the restoration of all things, of which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets from time immemorial.

Even in the years just before the Son came to earth, the Spirit was speaking of him through holy men such as John the Baptist's father, the elderly priest, Zacharias. He, too, testified that God's prophets had been prophesying of the coming Messiah for a very long time:

Luke 1

68. Blessed be the LORD, God of Israel, for He has visited and brought redemption to His people!
 69. And He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David, His servant,
 70. as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, from earliest times.

Those holy prophets spoke of the Son of God in such detail that when one is reading their prophecies, it is easy to forget that they had no knowledge of the Son, not even that he existed. The only thing that God allowed the ancient prophets to understand was that their prophecies would not be fulfilled in their day:

1Peter 1

10. The prophets who prophesied of the grace that *has come* to you earnestly sought and diligently inquired about this salvation,
 11. trying to determine who or what time the Spirit of Christ that was in them was indicating when it testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that would follow.
 12a. To them it was revealed that they were not ministering those things to themselves, but to you.

So, the only knowledge the ancient prophets were given concerning their prophecies of the coming Messiah was that the prophecies were not for their own time. God's prophets had to resign themselves to life within an enigma in which they could feel the Son, be moved upon by the Son, and even have the Son speak through them, without even suspecting that there was a Son.

The following are some remarkable instances of the hidden Son of God speaking of himself through Old Testament prophets, along with instances of the Father speaking to and about the Son through the same prophets.

“A MASTER WORKMAN”

As we will show, examples abound of the Spirit moving on the ancient prophets to declare the Son's coming in the future, but Proverbs 8⁴⁰ looks in the opposite direction. It reveals something of his past. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he refers to Christ as “the wisdom of God” (1Cor. 1:24). In Proverbs 8, the Son of God also refers to himself as “Wisdom”, and

⁴⁰ See the Appendix for the first half of Proverbs 8, in which the Son speaks of himself as God's Wisdom.

then he goes on to describe his happy life with the Father before the creation of the world and afterward:

Proverbs 8

22. The LORD created me the beginning of His way, the first of His works.
23. I was anointed from eternity, before the beginning, before earth existed.
24. I was brought forth when there were no depths *of the sea*, when there were no springs abounding with water.
25. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I was brought forth.
26. When He had not made the earth, and the open fields, and the first elements of the world,
27. when He prepared the heavens, I was there. When He decreed a circle on the face of the deep,
28. when He established the thin clouds above, when He made strong the fountains of the sea,
29. when He made His decree for the sea, that the waters should not disobey His word, when He decreed the foundations of the earth,
30. I was at His side, like a master workman, daily His great delight, always laughing in His presence,
31. rejoicing in the world, His earth; and my delights were with the sons of men.

It is because the Son was the one through whom God created all things that he described himself as a “master workman” (verse 30, above). Still, every creature, including the Son, owes all glory to the Father for creation, and it should cause us no theological problem that the Son spoke here as if the Father is the Creator. The Son always gave the Father credit for creation (e.g., Mk. 10:6). Although he was the Father’s agent for creating everything, he knew that creation was accomplished only through his Father’s will and wisdom and power. The Son of God freely and humbly admitted that he could do nothing without his Father’s guidance and aid (Jn. 5:30).

GOD’S “FELLOW”

A “fellow” is one who shares a certain kind of life or experience with another. Before the Spirit was given to man on the day of Pentecost, only the Son shared God’s kind of life, and no one knew that God had such a fellow. For God to be unique, it would seem that such a thing was impossible. How could the Almighty have a fellow, a companion who shared His thoughts and His feelings? Nobody in heaven or earth could have answered that question before the Son was revealed. Or, more probably, everyone would have confidently given the wrong answer; namely, that God had no fellow and that there could never be anyone enough like Him to be considered His fellow – even though God Himself, through Zechariah the prophet, said He had one!

Jesus was quoting Zechariah at the Last Supper when he told his disciples they would all desert him. And he made it clear to them that Zechariah’s words were a prophecy of what was about to take place that very night:

Matthew 26

31. Tonight, all of you will be offended because of me, for it is written, “I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.”

The disciples did not believe what Jesus said, and they all insisted that they would never desert him (Mt. 26:33–35), even though within hours, they all did just that. But there is more to Zechariah’s prophecy than what Jesus quoted that night, and it was good that he did not quote it all. Doing so would have given his disciples even more problems, for in the other half of Zechariah’s prophecy, God referred to the smitten Shepherd as His *fellow*!

Zechariah 13

- 7a. “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, even against the mighty one *who is my fellow*,” says the LORD of hosts. “Strike the shepherd, and the flock will be scattered.”

If God said He had a fellow, then what are we to believe but that He had one?

THE SON’S FELLOWS

A verse from Psalm 45, referred to previously for a different purpose, contains an astonishing but little recognized element. For in that verse, the Father promises His hidden Son that he, too, would have fellows:

Psalm 45

7. You love righteousness, and you hate wickedness; therefore, God – *even your God* – has anointed you more than your fellows with the oil of joy.

What makes this such an astonishing prophecy is the greatness of the hidden Son. Being the perfect reflection of God’s person, it was impossible for the Son to have *many* fellows, just as it was impossible for the Father to have just one. The only way God could ever have had a fellow was for Him to create one. And He created a fellow for Himself when He created a Son with His kind of life. Likewise, the only way for the Son to ever have fellows was for His Father to create some fellows for him, which He did on the day of Pentecost when He poured out on Jesus’ followers the same life He had given to the Son in the beginning. But the Father’s promise to His Son was not just kept on the day of Pentecost, for since that wonderful day, God has continued to keep His promise, again and again. Every time the Father fills another repentant soul with His kind of life, the Spirit, He creates for His Son yet another fellow, hidden from the world just as His Son was. The apostles marveled at this grace:

1John 3

1. Oh, what great love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! This is why the world does not know you, because it did not know Him.

Romans 8

29. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Partaking of God's life creates within us *fellowship* with Him and Christ. It was a matter of the greatest joy to John to be able to say, "Our fellowship truly *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1Jn. 1:3). Paul expressed to the Corinthians his gratitude for the fellowship he had with them in Christ: "I thank my God always for you, for the grace of God which is given to you in Christ Jesus, . . . by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1Cor. 1:4; 9b).

Had people in the Psalmist's time known about the Son, they would have been astonished at Psalm 45:7 for saying that the Son of God would have fellows. However, since no one at that time knew that the Father had a Son as His fellow, no one could have understood the Father's promise that the Son would have fellows, too. It was all hidden until men experienced for themselves the sacred fellowship of the Father and the Son.

It must be noted that the Son's coming to earth did not make humans his fellows; his physical presence here did not create fellowship between God and man. If that were so, the disciples would have understood what the Son was doing while he was here. The Son becoming human gave him fellowship with humanity, but it did not do the reverse. Humans had no fellowship with him or his Father while he was here. That is why humans killed him (1Cor. 2:7-9). The Son had to suffer and die, and then ascend and offer himself to God, in order for the opportunity to exist for man to enjoy the fellowship of eternal life with God.

TWO ISRAELS

The Old Testament nation of saints was called Israel because that was the name that God gave to Jacob, the father of that nation (Gen. 32:28). The New Testament nation of saints is also called Israel (Gal. 6:16) because that is one of the names that God gave to His Son, the father of the New Testament spiritual nation of saints. The Son spoke through Isaiah of the Father calling him Israel:

Isaiah 49

1. Hear me, O isles! Listen, people from afar! The LORD [the Father]⁴¹ called me from the womb. From my mother's belly, He made mention of my name.
2. He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand, He hid me. He made me a polished arrow; in His quiver, He has hidden me.
3. He said to me, "You are my servant Israel, for in you, I will glorify myself."

TWO HOLY ONES

In Isaiah 49, two "holy ones" are mentioned. One is the Father, and the other is the Son, whom the Father again calls "Israel":

Isaiah 49

7. Thus said the LORD [the Father], the redeemer of His holy one, Israel [the Son], to the one despised by man, the one abhorred by the nation, a servant of rulers: "Kings shall see and arise, and princes shall bow down because of

⁴¹ The Reader will need to remember the previously mentioned distinction between "LORD" and "Lord" (cf. Footnote 6, page 15), which is that "LORD" refers to the Father, while "Lord" refers to the Son.

the LORD who is faithful, Israel's [the Son's] Holy One, *who* has chosen you."

The Father, then, has a holy one, His Son, whom men hated. And the Son, too, has a Holy One, his Father, whom he loved.

WHICH GOD DID IT?

In the case of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Father ("LORD") consistently declares that the Son ("God") is the one who destroyed those cities. Speaking to the rebellious earthly nation of Israel, the Father said,

Amos 4

11. "I have overthrown some of you, as God [the Son] overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. . . . Still, you have not returned to me," says the LORD.

Jeremiah 50

40a. "God [the Son] overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbors," says the LORD.

In Isaiah 13:17, God declares that He will "stir up" the Medes against Babylon. But then, in verse 19, the same speaker refers to "God" as if "God" is somebody else! And it *is* someone else. It is the Son.

Isaiah 13

17a. I [the LORD] will stir up the Medes against them [the Babylonians].

...

19. And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty and the pride of the Chaldeans, shall be as when God [the Son] overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.

In the prophets, the Father did not hesitate to refer to His hidden Son as God, and neither should we. The apostles agreed with the Father in referring to the Son as God (e.g., Heb. 1:8–9) after their eyes were opened to see the Son for who he was, and who he had always been. After all, Jesus had told them that God wants men to "honor the Son just as they honor the Father" (Jn. 5:23).

"I WILL SHAKE THE HEAVENS"

While here among us, the Son of God said that heaven and earth will be destroyed (Mt. 24:35). But through Isaiah, the hidden Son had already foretold of that cataclysmic event. When he spoke through Isaiah, however, he added some mystery to the prophecy, for the one speaking said that he would destroy heaven and earth "in the wrath of the LORD":

Isaiah 13 (cp. Heb. 12:26–27)

13. Therefore, I [the Son] will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of its place in the wrath of the LORD of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger.

Isaiah must have been puzzled by his prophecy. Who but the LORD could shake heaven and earth? And yet, the voice that spoke through him, saying that he would shake heaven and earth, also said that he would shake heaven and earth in the wrath *of the LORD* and in *His* fierce anger.

Whose voice was this, Isaiah must have asked, that would one day shake heaven and earth, but in the LORD's power instead of his own?

THROUGH THE SAME PROPHET, AT THE SAME TIME

Most amazing of all, perhaps, are the prophecies in which the Father and the Son speak to or of one another. Nothing demonstrates the astonishing power and unity of the Father and the Son quite like these prophecies in which the Father speaks – *and then the Son speaks through the same prophet, during the same prophecy!* That sounds strange to us humans because it is foreign to human experience, but it is not strange to God. As we have said, God's kind of life is different from and superior to ours, and He can do things that humans cannot even think to do. Coming across such extraordinary prophecies as these makes reading the Old Testament prophets an exciting adventure.

Example #1: Isaiah

In the following scriptures, the Father speaks of ordaining His Son and of sending him and His Spirit to rescue fallen man, and then the Son speaks of his existence from the beginning of creation, and his mission to earth:

Isaiah 48

The Father:

15. I, even I have spoken! Yes, I ordained him; I sent him, and he made his way successful.

The Son:

16. Draw near to me! Hear this! From the beginning, I have not spoken in secret. From the beginning of time, I was there. And now, my Master, the LORD, has sent me and His Spirit.

Example #2: Malachi

In Malachi's prophecy of the Son's entrance into the world, it is clear when the Son speaks to Israel because the Son uses the word "I", as opposed to the Father, who refers to the Son as "he":

Malachi 3

The Son (to Israel):

- 1a. I will send my messenger [John the Baptist], and he shall prepare the way before me.

The Father (to Israel):

- 1b. "The Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant whom you desire. Behold, he is coming!" says the LORD of hosts.

Whenever the Father spoke through the prophets in the first person ("I"), it was because the Father Himself existed, a fully alive and thinking being. That is never disputed. But as Malachi 3:1 shows us, the Son also spoke through the prophets using the pronoun "I". Why, then, should we not think that when the Son spoke, he also existed as a fully alive and thinking being? Everyone will agree that when the Father spoke through the prophets, it really was the Father.

Why, then, should we think that when the Son spoke through the prophets, it was not really the Son? Why should we think, as some teach, it was only the Father speaking as if He were the Son because the Son didn't really exist yet, except as an idea in God's mind? Or why should we think, as Trinitarian believers would have it, that in the prophets, there were two co-equal and co-eternal hypostases of a triune Being talking through the prophets, first as one person and then as another, back and forth? Or again, why should we think that the Father and the Son are the same person altogether, as those of the Oneness faith teach, so that God was speaking through the prophets in a way that made it seem as if two people were speaking instead of one?

Nothing in the writings of the prophets and apostles would lead an impartial seeker of truth to any of the three conclusions described above. No scriptural basis exists for thinking that the Son's "I" means something different from the "I" of the Father. Therefore, I have concluded that in the matter of whether or not the Son existed as a separate person with the Father, the "I's" have it!

BECAUSE HE WANTED A CHILD

Many ancient prophecies had a dual meaning, one which applied to that time, and another which would only come to light in the future. For example, Isaiah prophesied that a foreign army, speaking a foreign language, would invade the land and bring relief to the upright from the oppression of their wicked rulers:

Isaiah 28

11. He shall speak to this people with stammering lips and another tongue,
12. to whom He said, "This is the rest with which you will cause the weary one to rest," and, "This is the refreshing." Yet, they would not listen.

No doubt, Paul had read that prophecy many times as a young Pharisee, but after receiving God's kind of life, he read with enlightened eyes that familiar prophecy of people speaking a language that could not be understood, and he realized that God had something more than foreign soldiers in mind when He spoke those words through Isaiah. To the saints in Corinth, Paul explained that Isaiah was prophesying of the miraculous New Testament experience of speaking in tongues:

1Corinthians 14

21. In the law, it is written, "With other tongues and other lips will I speak to this people, and even at that, they will not listen to me, says the LORD."
- 22a. So then, tongues are for a sign. . . .

The prophet Malachi provides us with another prophecy with a double meaning. It is a mysterious verse, difficult to translate, as a survey of Old Testament translations will show, but its purpose in Malachi's time was to provide God's reason for insisting that Israelite men be faithful to their Israelite wives:

Malachi 2

- 15a. Did He not make one? And the rest of the spirit was His. And why one? He was seeking a godly seed.

But this verse also contained a hidden revelation concerning God's reason for creating the Son, for it is just as easily translated thus:

Malachi 2

15a. Did He not create one in whom is the fullness of the Spirit? And why him?
Because He wanted a divine child.

God created whatever He created only because He wanted to create it (Ps. 135:6). That being true, it is only reasonable for us to conclude, as Malachi said here, that God created the Son because He wanted a divine child for Himself.

UNTIL THE SPIRIT CAME

Even before the Spirit came, Jesus opened the minds of some of his followers so that they could see him in the Old Testament (Lk. 24:25–27, 32, 45). They must have been amazed at what they could then see in the law and the prophets. They must have wondered, as many of us have wondered who knew the Bible before our eyes were opened by Christ, "Have these things been in the Bible the whole time?" How thrilling an experience it must have been for believing Jews to read their old, familiar scriptures and to have them transformed into a new and refreshing message from their God, the message of His Son. And then, when the Father sent His kind of life to Jesus' followers on the day of Pentecost, they began to truly know the God that their scriptures had told them about, and to truly know the Son who had just been to earth and walked among them.

But even after God shared His life with man, the angels remained without it, and therefore, they remained without the knowledge of God. They knew that God existed, of course; they had beheld His face in heaven for ages. But they did not truly know Him, and they never will because the Son did not die for them to have God's life. He died for us. They also know – now – that the Son exists, but they will never know him as those with God's life know him. God's fellowship with His children is a complete mystery to them.

Knowing *about* God is not the same as knowing God. Satan and all the other heavenly creatures knew *about* God, having lived in His very presence and spoken with Him face to face, but they did not, and they still do not, know Him. Deeply religious men in ancient Israel labored in study to become experts in the Bible, but without God's life, they, too, could only know *about* their God. They, too, would never know *Him* without His life. In fact, they would never rightly understand the scriptures to which they were devoted without receiving the Spirit of the One who inspired them. It takes the same kind of life to understand the Bible that it took to write it.

Paul said that "whatever was written before was written for our learning" (Rom. 15:4); however, "what had been written before" could only tell men *about* the Son; it took the life of God to truly reveal him. The Son walked among men in plain sight, and John plainly said that they saw him with their eyes and touched him with their hands (1Jn. 1:1). He performed thousands of miracles and sometimes plainly stated who he was; still, everyone, including John, had to wait until the Spirit came to be able to truly understand what their eyes had seen and their hands had handled. Neither the Son's physical presence nor the scriptures that spoke of him gave them the knowledge of God.

Now, since the “light of life” has come into the world and “enlightened all men”, people can see references to the Son in the Old Testament without actually having God’s life within them. Apollos, for example, before receiving the Spirit, “powerfully and publicly confuted the Jews, showing by the scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah” (Acts 18:28). Not long afterward, Apollos did receive the life of God, and he eventually became one of Paul’s trusted helpers (1Cor. 3:6; 16:12). Of course, many very religious people hear about the Son or read about him in the Bible, but do not humble themselves to him and receive God’s kind of life as Apollos did. To such people, Jesus once said, and still is saying,

John 5

39. You search the scriptures because you think that in them *you* have eternal life, but those *scriptures* are they which testify of me!
40. But you will not come to me that you might have life.

Apollos was a good example for all who have been enlightened to the fact of the existence of God’s Son. When he was told that the Messiah would give him a baptism of life, he was wise enough and humble enough to repent and come to the Son in order to receive it (Acts 18:26). He did not trust his prodigious knowledge of the scriptures to save him. Instead, he put his trust in the Son of whom the scriptures spoke.

WHEN THE MESSIAH WOULD COME

The angel Gabriel revealed to Daniel the precise year when God would send the Messiah, using the term “week” to represent seven years instead of seven days:

Daniel 9

22. And *Gabriel* caused me to understand, and he talked with me and said, “O Daniel, I have come forth now to give you insight *and* understanding.

...

- 25a. Know, therefore, and understand that from the going forth of the commandment to return and to rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and sixty and two weeks.”

Sixty-nine weeks of years (69x7) gives us 483 years. Precisely when to start counting those 483 years is unclear because of a lack of adequate historical sources; however, all available historical evidence points unmistakably to Jesus’ time.

The Jews knew of Gabriel’s amazing prophecy of when their Messiah would come, and many, no doubt, were expecting the Messiah to come in the days Jesus walked among them. King Herod’s information certainly led him to think it was time for the Messiah, and he murdered every male child of Jesus’ age in and around Bethlehem in an attempt to get rid of him (Mt. 2:13–18).

WHERE THE MESSIAH WOULD BE BORN

Through Micah, in about 700 BC, the Father revealed the name of the town where Jesus would be born:

Micah 5

2. But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you be small among the families of Judah, yet out of you shall he come forth to me who is to be ruler in Israel. His origin is from ancient times, from the days of eternity.⁴²

Hebrews 7:3 tells us that Melchizedek was a figure of the Son of God because no one made a record of the beginning of either Melchizedek or God's Son. But someone did make a record of the beginning of Mary's son. The story of his birth is found in both Matthew and Luke. If the birth of Mary's son in Bethlehem was the real beginning of the Son of God, then the author of Hebrews completely missed the mark by comparing the Son with Melchizedek. But he did not miss the mark. The Son of God did *not* have a beginning anywhere on earth because the Son existed before the earth did and was God's agent in creating it.⁴³

Micah's prophecy of the coming Messiah was well-known to the Jewish elders. When the "wise men from the East" came to Jerusalem and asked King Herod where to find the child who was "born King of the Jews" (Mt. 2:2), the paranoid King then asked Israel's elders where their Messiah would be born. They knew immediately to quote Micah's prophecy:

Matthew 2

5. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet,
6. 'And you, Bethlehem, *in the* land of Judah, you are by no means least among the rulers in Judah, for out of you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'"

THE MESSIAH WOULD BE A VIRGIN'S SON

Perhaps the best known prophecy about the Messiah is the one concerning a virgin miraculously giving birth to a son who would be called Immanuel, a word that means "God with us".⁴⁴

Isaiah 7

14. The Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and give birth to a son, and you⁴⁵ shall call his name Immanuel.

⁴² One may ask, "If the Son of God did not come to earth by entering into Mary's womb, then how could God refer to the baby born in Bethlehem as originating "from ancient times, from the days of eternity"? The answer has been given at the end of Chapter 1, under the title, "THE PEOPLE'S CONFUSION: TWO SONS", and will be touched on again in the first paragraph of Chapter 7.

⁴³ Hebrews 7:3 also tells us that no record was made of the *end* of the Son of God. Yet, the record of the death of the son that was born to Mary is found in all four of the Gospels.

⁴⁴ In the Bible, when a name was prophetically given, it foretold the child's character or appointed function. While Christ walked on earth, God was with us ("Immanuel") because God's life was in Christ (Jn. 1:4; 2Cor. 5:19). Now, God is with us because God's life is in believers (1Cor. 3:16; 2Cor. 6:16).

⁴⁵ Interestingly, the first "you" in this verse is a plural masculine pronoun (referring to all Israel), while the second "you" is singular *and feminine!* But Mary did not give this name to Jesus. In Luke 1:31, Gabriel told Mary to name her child "Jesus" (that is, "Savior"). Gabriel said nothing of the name Immanuel. Besides that, the name Immanuel would not have applied to Mary's son until God's Son came from heaven and became one with him. So, it remains a mystery as to who called Jesus "Immanuel". One possible answer is that the feminine singular "you" refers to the Bride of Christ, who proclaims to the world that Jesus, her coming Bridegroom, was "God with us".

Matthew 1

18. This is how the birth of Jesus came about. After his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child by *the* holy Spirit.

Luke 1

26. In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee called Nazareth,
 27. to a virgin who was betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.
 . . .
 29. And when she saw *him*, she was perplexed by his speech, wondering what kind of greeting this might be.
 30. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God.
 31. Behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and you shall call his name Jesus."

WHERE THE MESSIAH WOULD GROW UP

Double meanings for words are common in the Old Testament because God was hiding His Son and yet speaking of him at the same time. The word "Nazareth" can be used to show this. In Isaiah 48:6, God said, "I am causing you to hear new things, even hidden things that you do not know." In Hebrew, the word for "hidden things" is also the word for "Nazareth". God knew, of course, that "hidden things" was identical with "Nazareth", and He knew that Jesus would grow up in a village by that name. He artfully chose the word for Nazareth as an example of the "hidden things" that He was causing Israel to hear, and He knew that after His Son was revealed, some would see "Nazareth" in Isaiah 48:6 because they would then know that Jesus grew up there.

Perhaps the most amazing prophetic use of the Hebrew word for "hidden things" came when Jesus was crucified. With grim wit, Pilate provoked the rulers of the Jews by ordering his soldiers to nail this title above Jesus' head on the cross: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" (Jn. 19:19–22). With that sardonic title, Pilate was showing his deep disdain for the Jews who had demanded Jesus' death. But God, by moving Pilate to add that title to Jesus' cross, was once again cryptically declaring who His dying Son really was: "Jesus the Hidden One, King of the Jews".

WHAT THE MESSIAH WOULD LOOK LIKE

Through Isaiah, God also said that the body which His Son would come to earth and take on would be very unattractive:

Isaiah 53

- 2b. He shall have no form or majesty, and when we see him, there shall be no beauty that we should desire him.

THE MESSIAH'S NAME

It may seem that everything about the Son is revealed in the Old Testament except his name. However, if we read the story of Moses and Joshua as God intended for it to be read – in the light of God's life – even his name is found in those ancient scriptures.

Moses' failure to bring God's people into the land of promise was a figure of the law's inability to give God's people God's kind of life. God commanded Moses to anoint a man named Joshua to finish the work. Jesus' name in Hebrew is Joshua, and in order for the saints to attain to the promise of God, Moses (the law) had to be replaced by the one God chose: "Joshua" in both cases.

WHERE THE MESSIAH WOULD PREACH

When we study the geography mentioned in the four Gospels, we learn that Jesus spent most of his time ministering in and around Galilee. This is what Isaiah said Jesus would do (Isa. 9:1–2), a prophecy that Matthew quoted when he told Jesus' story:

Matthew 4

12. When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he departed into Galilee,
13. and leaving Nazareth, he went and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali,
14. so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled:
15. "O land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles!
16. The people who sit in darkness saw a great light. For those sitting in the region and shadow of death, a light has dawned."

THE MESSIAH'S PERSECUTIONS

In this prophecy, the Son told of some of the cruel abuse he would suffer when he came to earth:

Isaiah 50

6. I gave my back to the strikers, and my cheeks to those who pulled out *my beard*. I did not hide my face from shame or spit.

Jesus' face was spat upon and beaten by the Jews who arrested him (Mt. 26:67–68; Mk. 14:65). Hours later, the Roman soldiers plaited a crown of thorns, placed it on Jesus' head, and then drove the thorns into his head with blows from a rod (Mk. 15:17–19). His beard was ripped off his face, and the flesh was torn off his back with a whip that was probably tipped with bits of metal and glass. By the time the Jews and the Roman soldiers finished their cruel abuse, Jesus' eyes were so swollen and his face and body so torn and bloody that he did not even look human. The Father foretold this, too, first speaking *to* His Son and then *about* him:

Isaiah 52

14. Many shall be aghast at you. So great shall be the disfigurement of his visage that *it will be* beyond human, and his form, beyond the sons of men.

The Father continued in the next verse to proclaim that the torture and killing of His Son would accomplish the purpose for which He sent him to earth; to wit, the sins of many people would be washed away and the true knowledge of God would be granted to them:

15. By this, he shall sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at him, for that which had not been told them, they shall see, and that which they had not heard, they shall understand.

In Psalm 69, the Son described the cruel persecutions he would suffer at the hands of God's people.⁴⁶ He told of how his beloved Israel would hate him for no reason (v. 4) and how all the people, including Mary's other children, would treat him like a foreigner (v. 8). He said through the prophet that the pain of his reproach would send him to God with weeping and fasting but that his fellow Israelites would mock him even for doing that (vv. 3, 10). He also spoke of how he would be a public joke among the people (vv. 11–12). Finally, he foretold how their cruelty would continue even after he was nailed to the cross:

Psalm 69

21. They gave *me* gall for my food, and in my thirst, they gave me vinegar to drink.

Luke 23 (cp. Mt. 27:33–34)

36. The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him vinegar,
37. saying, "Since you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

THE FATHER WOULD ENCOURAGE THE SON

The Son even foretold of the day when he, as a servant of God on earth, would experience the human feeling of despair, fearing that he would fail in his mission to convince the Jews of the light of God's love and salvation. But then he went on to say that the Father would encourage him with a promise, the incredible promise that even if the Jews rejected him, he would still be God's chosen one, to bring the light of salvation to the whole world:

Isaiah 49

4. As for me [the Son], I said, "I have labored for nothing; I have spent my strength in vain. For nothing! Yet, my judgment is surely with the LORD, and my reward with my God."
5. And then the LORD, the One who formed me from the womb as His servant to bring Jacob back to Him, said that even if Israel is not brought in, I will yet be honored in the LORD's eyes. My God is my strength!
6. Then He said *to me*, "It is too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, to bring back those of Israel who are preserved. I have appointed you to be a light for the nations, to be my salvation to the end of the earth."

⁴⁶ See also Psalm 109, in which the Son speaks of his future persecutions and foretells of the terrifying prayer he would pray against his enemies, especially Judas the betrayer.

One of the most undervalued prophecies about the Son in the Old Testament is the following prophecy from Isaiah 42. In it, one can sense the Father's great love for His Son:

Isaiah 42

4. He shall not fail, nor be discouraged, until he has established justice on the earth, and the isles shall wait for his law.
5. Thus says the LORD God, Creator of the heavens, and He who stretched them out, He who shaped the earth and that which comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it, and breath to those who live in it:
6. "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness, and I will hold your hand and keep you hidden. And then, I will give you for a covenant for the people, for a light of the nations."

THE REASON THE MESSIAH WOULD DIE

Isaiah foretold that the Messiah would be tortured and killed for the sake of others:

Isaiah 53

4. He has taken our sicknesses and borne our sufferings, yet we considered him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.
5. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; chastisement for our peace was laid upon him; and by his wounds, we are healed.
6. We all, like sheep, have gone astray; every one of us has turned to his own way, and the LORD has laid upon him the iniquity of us all.

The angel Gabriel told Daniel the same thing:

Daniel 9

- 26a. The Messiah will be cut off, but not for himself.

Isaiah 53 also revealed the reason he suffered (vv. 8b, 11b), and it rivaled the Psalms in giving details about the Messiah. It spoke of his unjust trial (v. 8a), his innocence (v. 9b), and his humility (v. 7). It also revealed that the Messiah would be buried in a rich man's tomb (v. 9a) and that God would accept the Son's sacrifice (vv. 10–11a) and reward him (v. 12a).

Isaiah 53

3. He [the Son] *was* despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and he knew sickness. *He was* like one hiding *his* face from us. He was despised, and we did not value him.

...

7. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.

(Fulfilled in Mk. 15:3–5)

8. He was taken from prison and from justice, and who shall declare his generation? He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

9. He made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death, although he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

(Fulfilled in Mt. 27:57–60)

10. Yet it pleased the LORD [the Father] to crush him; He has put him to grief. When you [the Father] make his soul an offering for sin, he [the Son] shall see his seed.⁴⁷ He [the Father] shall prolong his [the Son's] days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

- 11a. He [the Father] will see the travail of his soul, and will be satisfied.

The Father then speaks:

- 11b. By knowledge, my righteous servant shall justify many, for he will bear their iniquities.

12. Therefore will I [the Father] divide to him [the Son] a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong because he exposed his soul to death and was numbered with transgressors. Yet, he bore the sins of many and interceded for transgressors.

THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER

The priests and elders of Israel paid Judas thirty pieces of silver to betray Jesus. At an opportune moment, away from the crowds of ordinary people who loved to hear Jesus (Mk. 12:37), Judas led the priests and elders to the garden where Jesus had gone to pray. Afterward, the repentant Judas returned to the same elders, confessing that he had done evil to an innocent man. Those revered leaders of God's people then gave Judas what was, considering the circumstances, possibly the coldest response ever given to a confession of sin. They mockingly replied to Judas' terror and tears, "What is that to us? You see to *that*" (Mt. 27:4). Judas then threw the bag of silver pieces to the floor of the house of God, and ran out and killed himself. The priests, not wanting to pollute their temple with blood money, decided to use the thirty pieces of silver to buy "the field of the potter" as a place to bury non-Jews (Mt. 27:7). The prophet Zechariah was moved by the hidden Son of God to foretell this:

Zechariah 11

12. And I [the Son] said to them [the chief priests], "If it seems good in your eyes, give me my price; and if not, don't." So, as my price, they weighed thirty pieces of silver.
13. And then the LORD [the Father] said to me [the Son], "Throw it down (the very high price at which I was appraised by them) for the potter." So, I took the thirty pieces of silver, and I threw them down for the potter in the house of the LORD.

This prophecy tells us that the Son was not a victim. He and his Father were in complete control of what was taking place, even to the point of determining how much money the priests would pay Judas and what would eventually be done with that blood money. Jesus told his disciples in John 10:17–18, "The Father loves me because I lay down my life, that I might take it

⁴⁷ This phrase "his seed" can also be translated, "his children", "his offspring", or "his family".

again. No one takes it from me; I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I received this commandment from my Father.” The Son’s sacrifice was altogether the plan of God, and no man, nor Satan, nor any other creature possessed either the wisdom or the love sufficient to be given any credit for it. And to help us understand that, God and His Son told us through the prophets all that would happen, centuries before it did.

CONDITIONS ON THE DAY HE DIED

The Son revealed through David that his Father would bring darkness over the land and bend the heavens low to be near him as he suffered on the cross:

Psalm 18

9. He bowed the heavens, and came down, and darkness was under His feet.

The Son also foretold the earthquake that attended his death:

Psalm 18

6. In my distress, I will call on the LORD; I will cry out to my God for help. He will hear my voice from His temple, and my plea will come to Him, *even* into His ears.
7. Then the earth shook and trembled, and the foundations of the mountains moved; they were shaken because He burned with anger.

A thousand years later, these things happened, just as the Son said they would:

Matthew 27

45. From about the sixth hour, it grew dark over all the land until the ninth hour.
...
50. Then Jesus, when he had cried out again with a loud voice, gave up the spirit,
51b. and the earth shook, and the rocks were split apart.

DETAILS OF HIS CRUCIFIXION

In Psalm 22, below, the Son revealed the cruel manner in which he would die (v. 16) and described his desperate thirst while struggling on the cross (v. 15). He foretold some of the very words he would speak while in agony (v. 1), as well as what his adversaries would say to him as they gloated over his death struggle (vv. 7–8). He also spoke of the Roman soldiers who crucified him and of their casting lots for his clothing (v. 18). He even revealed details about himself and his crucifixion that are not found in the New Testament, such as the fact that his joints separated as he struggled on the cross (v. 14) and that by the time of his crucifixion, his body would be so emaciated by fasting and labor that his bones would show enough to be counted (v. 17).

Psalm 22

1. My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from delivering me *and from* the words of my anguished cry?
(Fulfilled in Mt. 27:46)
...

6. But I am a worm, and not a man, a reproach to men, and despised by people.
7. Everyone who sees me ridicules me. They smirk; they shake the head, *saying,*
8. “He trusted in the LORD, that He would deliver him; let Him rescue him, seeing He delighted in him.”
(Fulfilled in Mt. 27:41–43)
9. You are the One who took me out of the womb. You made me secure when I was on my mother’s breasts.
10. I was cast upon you from the womb. From my mother’s belly, you are my God.
11. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near; for there is no one to help.
...
14. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax; it is melted within me.
15. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue is stuck to my palate, and you have brought me to the dust of death.
(Fulfilled in Jn. 19:28)
16. Dogs encompass me; the assembly of the wicked encircle me. They pierced my hands and my feet.
(Fulfilled in Mt. 27:35a)
17. I can count all my bones. They gaze and stare at me.
18. They divide my clothes among them, and they cast lots on my garment.
(Fulfilled in Jn. 19:23–24)
19. But you, O LORD, do not be far off! My Strength! Hurry to help me!

THE MESSIAH’S DESCENT INTO HELL

After he came to earth, the Son said that Jonah’s three days in the belly of the whale was a figure of his time in the heart of the earth (Mt. 12:40). But a thousand years before he came, the Son spoke through David about his future descent into the heart of the earth to preach to the souls in prison (1Pet. 3:19), confessing his trust in his Father, that He would not leave him in that awful place:

Psalm 16

9. Therefore, my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices. My flesh also shall rest in hope.
10. For you [the Father] will not leave my soul in hell; neither will you allow your holy one to see corruption.

THE MESSIAH’S ASCENSION INTO HEAVEN

In Ephesians 4:8, Paul quotes another prophecy from Psalms to show that when Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, he received from the Father gifts of the Spirit for men:

Psalm 68

18. You have ascended on high! You have taken captivity captive, to procure gifts for men, even the rebellious, so that the LORD God might dwell *with them*.

THE SON'S GLORIFICATION

The previously mentioned Old Testament distinction between the Father and the Son ("LORD" for the Father, and "Lord" for the Son) is something Jesus himself referred to in Matthew 22:41–45. There, Jesus used that distinction to great effect, quoting David's famous line (Ps. 110:1), "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool,'" to show that the Son is greater than David, though not as great as God.

In Psalm 2, an awareness of that distinction is equally instructive. In this psalm, the Son (the Lord) tells of what happened to him after his ascension into heaven. He says that he and the Father (the LORD) will laugh to scorn the men on earth who tried to destroy him (v. 4), and he also tells of the Father placing him on a heavenly throne and giving him great promises:

Psalm 2

David:

1. Why do the Gentiles rage, and the people [the Israelites] imagine a vain thing?
2. The kings of the earth took a stand, and the rulers [of Israel] assembled together against the LORD and against His Messiah, *saying*,
3. "Let us tear off their bands, and cast off their cords from us."
4. He who dwells in heaven [the Father] will laugh. The Lord [the Son] will mock them.
5. Then, He [the Father] will speak to them in His wrath, and in His furious indignation will He discomfit them:
6. "In spite of *you*, I have enthroned my king upon Zion, my holy mountain."

The Son:

7. Let me tell of the ordinance of the LORD! He said to me, "You are my Son. Today, I have begotten you.
8. Ask of me, and I will give *you* the nations for your inheritance, even the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession.
9. You shall break them in pieces with a rod of iron; you shall smash them like a potter's vessel."

David:

10. Now then, O kings, be wise. Be instructed, O judges of earth.
11. Serve the LORD [the Father] with fear, and rejoice with trembling.
12. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish from the way when his anger is kindled but a little. Blessed are all who seek refuge in him.

What David thought when the Spirit said through him, "Kiss the Son," we can only imagine. All we know for sure is that the Son was still hidden and that David did not know that the Son of God was there to kiss, even though the Son spoke through him.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE RISEN MESSIAH

The glory that the Father gave the Son includes the authority, the “key”, to admit souls into the kingdom of God or to refuse them. Through Isaiah, the Father spoke mysteriously of this great authority which He would give to His Son:

Isaiah 22

- 20. And it shall come to pass in that day that I will call for my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah.
- 21b. I will commit your government into his hand, and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.
- 22. The key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder. He will open, and no one will shut; and he will shut, and no one will open.

Jesus mentioned this authority in his message to the pastor of the congregation of Philadelphia:

Revelation 3

- 7b. He who is holy, he who is true, he who has the key of David, he who opens and no one will close, and closes and no one opens, says these things.

In the Old Testament, the key of the house of David was the key to the king’s palace. The man to whom it was entrusted was the man of highest authority in the kingdom, next to the king himself. The management of all the king’s property and treasure was the responsibility of the man who held that key. He was in complete charge of the king’s household (2Kgs. 18:18). When Paul said of Christ Jesus, “in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3), he was speaking of Jesus’ power not only to admit men into God’s kingdom, but also to open or shut to them the riches of God’s wisdom and knowledge once they are in it.

Isaiah’s prophecy goes further still, foretelling of the Son’s unshakable authority, of his being killed, and finally, of God’s rejection of Israel:

Isaiah 22

- 23. I will fasten him like a peg in a sure place, and a glorious throne over his father’s house shall be his.
- 24. And they shall hang on him all the glory of his father’s house, the progeny and the products – every little vessel, from all the bowls to all the pitchers.
- 25. In that day, says the LORD of hosts, the peg that was fastened in a sure place shall be removed, and be cut down, and fall. Then, the burden that was on him shall be cut off, for the LORD has spoken.

When wicked men killed Jesus, “the peg that was fastened in a sure place” was “removed and cut down.” However, in Isaiah’s prophecy, God called His Son “Eliakim”, a name that means “God will raise up”. And after God raised up Jesus from the dead and the Jews refused to hear the gospel, the burden for Israel that was on Jesus’ shoulders was cut off. Instead, God gave His Son the Gentiles who believed the gospel (Acts 13:46; 18:6). While here ministering to the Jews, Jesus warned Israel’s leaders that God would cut Israel off and turn to the Gentiles if they

rejected him (Mt. 21:33–43), but they rejected him anyway, not fearing the consequences. Jesus' love for Israel was so strong that, at times, he broke down and wept for them (e.g., Lk. 19:41), and he still loves them. But when everyone in Israel who would believe had done so, Isaiah's awful prophecy came to pass, and the burden of the Jews was removed from Jesus' shoulders.

Near the end of his life, Paul warned the Jews that this was about to happen and that God was even then closing their door and turning to the Gentiles:

Acts 28

23. And when they [the Jews] had appointed him [Paul] a day, many came to him at *his* lodging, to whom he expounded upon and testified about the kingdom of God, persuading them from morning until evening of things concerning Jesus, from both the law of Moses and the prophets.
24. And there were some who believed the things *Paul* said, but some did not believe.
25. Being in disagreement among themselves, they began to leave, after Paul made one statement: "The holy Spirit spoke rightly to our fathers by Isaiah the prophet
26. when it said, 'Go to this people and say, "You will certainly hear, but you shall not understand, and you will certainly see, but you shall not perceive.
27. For the heart of this people has become dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have closed their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and repent, and I heal them.'"
28. Know, therefore, that the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles and that they will hear *it!*"

Isaiah's prophecy about God's Son having the key of David was concealed within a real situation (Isa. 22:15–25). That is not unusual. In the Old Testament, God frequently brought about historical situations and then used them to provide clues about His Son.⁴⁸ Of course, the ancient people who lived out those prophetic events did not see the clues or even see the events of their lives as prophetic. They were like Abraham, who never dreamed that two thousand years after he died, the apostle Paul would see in Abraham's two wives, Sarah and Hagar, figures of the two covenants that God would make with His people (Gal. 4:21–31). But then, Paul had the great advantage of having received the life of God, and with that life, Paul's eyes were opened to see Israel's history the way God designed it; that is, as a testimony to His beloved Son.

THE MESSIAH WOULD HAVE CHILDREN *AFTER HE DIED!*

In Isaiah 53:8, the prophet was moved by the Spirit to cry out against the unjust execution of the coming Messiah. Part of the reason for his lamentation was that the Messiah would be killed before he fathered any children. Isaiah rhetorically asked, "Who shall declare his generation?" That is, who would be able to record the names of the Messiah's children since he would

⁴⁸ For example, as previously mentioned, Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 28:12 of an invading army speaking a foreign language was also a prophecy about the holy Spirit prompting people to speak in tongues (1Cor. 14:21–22).

“generate” none? And yet, Isaiah’s question had already been answered, hundreds of years before it was even asked! God had provided the answer through King David:

Psalm 22

- 30. A seed shall serve Him [the Father], and it shall be accounted to the Lord [the Son] for a generation.
- 31. They shall come and declare His righteousness to a people that shall be born, that He has done this.

The followers of Christ who gathered in an upper room on the day of Pentecost became this “people that shall be born” when they were born again on that day. They became the children whom the Son wanted Israel to notice and to consider (Isa. 8:18). Born of the Spirit of God, they were counted as the Son’s children, and they became the ones who declared the righteousness of God to others who were also born not “of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (Jn. 1:12–13).

So, Isaiah said the Messiah would have no children, although centuries before, David had said they would be born! And for Isaiah, the mystery was magnified when, immediately after saying that the Messiah would have no children, the Spirit spoke through Isaiah again and said that the Messiah *would* have children after God made him an offering for sin:

Isaiah 53

- 10b. When you make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his generation.

It is easy to see why “the prophets earnestly sought and diligently inquired about this salvation” (1Pet. 1:10). Isaiah must have wondered how it could be that the Messiah would die without children but that after he died, he would have some. But that is exactly what happened. Jesus died so that those who believed in him could be born again in spirit. The disciples did not understand Jesus when he told them that they were like a woman about to come to the hour of birth (Jn. 16:20–22), but not long afterward, as Isaiah said would happen, the Messiah saw his children, for the disciples were born of God when the Spirit came with its baptism of regeneration (Acts 2:1–4; Tit. 3:5). What an amazing family! It is no wonder that the Son of God exclaimed, “I and the children the LORD has given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel!” (Isa. 8:18).

The Son and those who believe in him are the love of God’s life, and since the Son is “most blessed forever”, believers are most blessed with him. We are blessed that we have the Son as both a father and a God (Isa. 9:6) and that we have him as our brother (Rom. 8:29), our High Priest (Heb. 2:17; 4:14), our counsellor (Rev. 3:18), our life (Jn. 6:57), our friend (Jn. 15:13–15), and our Savior (Acts 5:31; Eph. 5:23). The Son of God is all things to us who believe, just as the Father is all things to the Son.

DANIEL SAW THE MESSIAH

As we have now seen, the Father painted a perfect picture of His Son in the law and the prophets to provide for Israel a thousand clues concerning their Messiah. Nothing, however, quite compares with the experiences of Daniel, a young Jew taken captive into Babylon by King

Nebuchadnezzar and made a eunuch for the king's service. God loved Daniel very much (Dan. 9:23) and allowed him to see the hidden Son – twice!

The First Vision: “The Stone”

In Daniel 2:1–5, King Nebuchadnezzar dreamed a dream which troubled him. He commanded his most trusted counsellors, including astrologers and sorcerers, to tell him what the dream meant. The only problem was that he could not remember the dream that he wanted them to interpret. When they humbly asked the king to tell them the dream so they could interpret it, he was enraged and said to them,

Daniel 2

5. The thing is completely gone from me! Now, if you do not tell me the dream, with its meaning, you shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill!

Of course, the king's counsellors could not tell him what he had dreamed, and so, Nebuchadnezzar gave the order to execute every “wise man” in his kingdom. Unfortunately, Daniel and his three Jewish friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, fell into that category. When the king's executioner appeared at Daniel's door, Daniel managed to persuade him to allow him to go ask the king for a little time to seek God for the answer. The king agreed, and Daniel went home to seek God.

Daniel 2

- 19a. Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision.

In the morning, Daniel returned to the king. What God had revealed to Daniel, and what Daniel now told Nebuchadnezzar, was that the king had gone to bed the previous night wondering about the future (Dan. 2:29) and that the dream was God's response to the king's desire to know what would come to pass after he died.

Daniel told the amazed king that in his dream, he had seen a giant image made, starting from the head downward, of gold, silver, brass, and then iron mixed with clay. This represented, said Daniel, the four kingdoms that would hold sway in the earth, one after the other, until God at last establishes an eternal kingdom that will be ruled by a mighty figure called “the Stone”:

Daniel 2

34. You watched until a Stone was cut out, without hands, which struck the image on its feet which were of iron and clay, and broke them to pieces.
35. Then the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold were crushed together and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors, and the wind carried them away, so that no place was found for them. And the Stone which struck the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.

...

- 45b. The great God has made known to the king what will take place after this *time*, and the dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.

God revealed to Daniel what he asked for, both the king's dream and its interpretation. But the identity of the main character, a man called "the Stone", remained a secret. Daniel saw the Stone who would someday destroy the kingdoms of man and replace them with a kingdom of his own that will "stand forever" (Dan. 2:44). This mysterious figure, the Stone, was the most important figure in the king's dream, and the kingdom given to the Stone was a major element of the king's dream, and yet, neither of them were explained to Daniel!

But the astonishing things that the King and Daniel saw and heard did not belong to them. They belonged to us, the seed of the dead man, the children of the one who rose from the dead to give us a new birth into God's kind of life. God gave Daniel the vision, but He kept its ultimate meaning secret until He created by His Spirit the people for whom Daniel was writing. Daniel was among those holy and wise men of whom Jesus spoke when he told his disciples, "Many prophets and righteous men longed to see the things you are seeing and did not see them, and to hear the things you are hearing and did not hear them." What Jesus could have said about Daniel is that "he saw, but he did not see, and he heard, but he did not hear."

The Second Vision: "One Like the Son of Man"

In the next vision of the future that God gave to Daniel, the same four kingdoms of Nebuchadnezzar's dream were represented by four beasts, rising from the sea:

Daniel 7

1. In the first year of Belshazzar, the king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream while on his bed, and he saw visions in his head. And he wrote down the dream, relating the sum of the events.
2. And when Daniel began, he said, "In my vision during the night, I was there, watching, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea.
3. And four great creatures came up from the sea, different from one another."

Daniel described in detail these four beasts, which represented the four great world powers of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.⁴⁹ Then Daniel went on to tell of seeing "one like the son of man" approach God and receive a kingdom that will never pass away:

Daniel 7

13. In the visions of the night, I was there, watching, and behold, *one* like a son of man was coming with the clouds of heaven, and he approached the Ancient of Days [the Father], and they ushered him in before Him.
14. And dominion was given to him, and majesty, and a kingdom. And all peoples, nations, and languages shall serve him. His dominion shall be an eternal dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingdom shall not be destroyed.

But the mysterious nature of the vision left Daniel troubled.

⁴⁹ There have been other significant cultures in the world, but these are the kingdoms principally involved in salvation history.

Daniel 7

15. As for me, Daniel, my spirit was shattered within its sheath, and the visions of my head terrified me.
16. I approached one of those who stood by, and I asked him the meaning of all this. And he told me, and made known to me the meaning of these things.

Not quite. The angel made known to Daniel the meaning of everything *except the most important part!* His explanation omitted the identity of the “one like a son of man” who “came with the clouds of heaven” and approached “the Ancient of Days” to “receive an eternal kingdom”. That omission is astonishing. But then, we must remember that the angel did not reveal the identity of that mysterious figure because he could not. The angel did not know who it was that received an eternal kingdom from God any more than Daniel did. It seems as if the angel altogether forgot about that person when he explained the vision to Daniel. But even more remarkably, Daniel did not even ask the angel about him! It is as if God blocked both their minds from pursuing the matter. It was obvious that the “one like a son of man” was not God, for God was “the Ancient of Days” to whom that mysterious figure came. So, who was this “son of man”? Perhaps Daniel was too overwhelmed by the experience to even think to ask:

Daniel 7

- 28b. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly troubled me, and my color changed, but I kept the matter in my heart.

It was at least in part because Daniel felt that something was incomplete about his understanding of the vision that he was left with such troubled thoughts. Daniel had been allowed to actually see the hidden Son of God, but then, God did not allow Daniel to think to ask who he was. As I said before, when God hides a thing, He hides it in plain view.

THE MESSIAH’S RETURN TO REIGN ON EARTH

The last few chapters of young Zechariah’s prophecies concern events that transpire at the end of this age when the Son will return to earth and reign. Zechariah foretold of the time that is coming when the whole world, in a final effort to eradicate the Jews, will unite behind an evil ruler whom John called “the Beast” (e.g., Rev. 13:1). The armies of the Beast will seem unstoppable, but the desperate prayers of the Jews will touch God’s heart, and He will send His Son from heaven to rescue the beleaguered nation of Israel (Zech. 14:3–4; cp. Rev. 19:11–21).

The Son declared through Zechariah that on that day, he will grant repentance to the Jews:

Zechariah 12

- 10a. I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and of supplications. And they shall look on me whom they pierced.

Someone among the Jews will notice that the hands of their heavenly Rescuer are badly scarred and will ask him about it. The tenderness in Jesus’ answer is overwhelming:

Zechariah 13

6. And one shall say to him, “What are these wounds in your hands?” And he will answer, “Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.”

Zechariah then describes the brokenness of the Jews when they realize that their Deliverer is Jesus, that he still loves them dearly, and that when their fathers killed him, they killed a merciful Savior who had come to redeem them from sin. And now, in their day, he has come to them again:

Zechariah 12

- 10b. And they shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only son, weeping bitterly over him as one bitterly weeps over the firstborn.
 11a. The wailing in Jerusalem on that day will be great,
 12a. and the land shall cry aloud in sorrow.

“THE EARTH” WILL NEVER HUNGER OR THIRST AGAIN

It will help to understand the next prophecy of the Son if one is aware that “the earth” is sometimes used prophetically as a reference to the people of God, just as “the sea” is sometimes used as a reference to people of the world. We find instances of God’s people being referred to as “the earth” in Psalm 2:10, Isaiah 66:8, and Revelation 12:16, while in Revelation 17:15, “the sea” represents the world’s “peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and languages.” Here in Isaiah 49, the Son reveals that the Father will answer his prayers for us and will give him power to raise “the earth” from the dead and to give them an eternal inheritance, never again to suffer hunger or thirst, or any such thing:

Isaiah 49

8. This is what the LORD [the Father] said: “In an acceptable time I will answer you, and in the day of salvation, I will help you. And I will watch over you and give you for a covenant of the people, to cause the earth [God’s people] to rise to inherit desolate inheritances,
 9. saying to the prisoners, ‘Come out!’ And to those in darkness, ‘Show yourselves!’ They shall feed along the roads, and their pastures *shall be* in all the high places.
 10. And they shall neither hunger nor thirst, and heat and sun shall not beat upon them. For He who pities them shall guide them, and by springs of water shall He refresh them.”

THE SON IS THE POINT

It is certainly true, as I have previously stated, that “when God hides things, He lays them out in full view and then does not allow those looking on to understand what they see.” In the Old Testament, it is as if God hid the Son in such plain sight that it blinded us. When we read the Old Testament books in the light of God’s life, they become, in their entirety, books about His Son. In their teachings, the New Testament men of God referred constantly to the writings of Old Testament men of God because with minds enlightened by the Spirit, they saw the Son in everything those men wrote. Even though they had only those ancient scriptures, God’s New Testament ministers fully preached the gospel of Christ because the Spirit had revealed to them what God had hidden in the Old Testament. Those ministers were neither foolish nor gullible. They were filled with holy life and were anointed to understand the mysteries of God. It was

revealed to them that God ordered Old Testament events so that they bore witness to His Son, even as He withheld all understanding of those events until the appointed time. How wonderful is the grace that we have received, to see and to understand what was hidden from so many righteous and wise saints of old!

The Father was thinking of His hidden Son when He told the Serpent that Eve would produce a “seed” that would crush his head (Gen. 3:15). He had His Son in mind when He commanded Moses to lift up the brass serpent in the wilderness so that those who were suffering could look upon it and be healed (Num. 21:8–9; Jn. 3:14–15). He had His Son in mind when He commanded Israel to make certain that not a bone of the Passover lamb was broken (Ex. 12:46; Jn. 19:36). He was thinking of the day that He would send the Spirit to earth to find a bride for His Son when He put it in Abraham’s heart to send his steward to the city of Nahor to find a bride for Isaac (Gen. 24:1–10). When God commanded Israel’s high priest to take the blood of animals into the room in the temple called “the Most Holy” to offer it for the sins of the people, He was thinking of His Son, whom He would command to do the same with his own blood in “the Most Holy” in heaven for the sins of the whole world (Lev. 16:14–15; Heb. 9:11–12). The Father was thinking of His Son when He sent to Israel the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of a cloud by day to lead them to the Promised Land (Num. 9:15–23), for He would later send His Son to guide His people through the wilderness of this world (1Pet. 2:21). God had His Son in mind when He put it in Pharaoh’s heart to exalt Joseph to the highest place in Egypt. Pharaoh handed over all his power to Joseph, saying to him, “Only in the throne will I be greater than you” (Gen. 41:40), and God has likewise given “all authority in heaven and on earth” to the Son (Mt. 28:18) while sitting, as Pharaoh did, on a higher throne. God was thinking of His Son when He promised that a “righteous Branch” would come to execute righteous judgment among God’s people (Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; Zech. 6:12).

The Father was thinking of His hidden Son when He created a wife for Adam. He could have instantaneously created the entire human race from dirt, the way He created Adam, but that would not have prepared us for the revelation of the Son. He wanted us to procreate so that we might experience the deep love of a parent for a child so that when His Son was revealed, we might be able to comprehend His love for the child He created for Himself before the world began. If all human beings had been created from dirt, the concept of having children and the powerful emotions that parents feel would be unknown to us. What, then, would God have called His Son so that we could understand who His Son was and what His Son meant to Him?

The Father was thinking of His Son when He gave Moses this warning for Israel:

Deuteronomy 18

18. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren, and I will put my words into his mouth, and he shall tell them all that I command him.
19. And it shall be, that whoever will not listen to my words, which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.

Peter tells us that God was thinking of how His Son would bring us life when He said through the prophet Joel, “It shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17a; Joel 2:28a).

Matthew tells us that God was thinking of His Son when He moved on Zechariah to proclaim, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold! Your King is coming to you!” (Zech. 9:9a; cp. Mt. 21:2–5). Likewise, Jude tells us that God was thinking of His Son’s return to earth to reign with his saints when He said through Enoch, “The Lord is coming with ten thousands of his saints!” (Jude 1:14). Isaiah tells us that God was thinking of His Son when the Spirit prompted him to cry out, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights. I have put my Spirit upon him, *and* he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles” (Isa. 42:1). Paul tells us that God was thinking of His Son when He parted the Red Sea (1Cor. 10:1–2), when He made Abraham a father (Gal. 4:22–28), and when He cursed whoever was nailed to a tree (Gal. 3:13). And finally, God was thinking of His Son when He promised that the upright, in a land very far away, would one day see “the King in his beauty” (Isa. 33:17).

Jesus said that his Father was thinking of him when He moved David to say, “The Stone that the builders rejected, the same has become the head of the corner” (Ps. 118:22; Mt. 21:42a). And when he told the leaders of Israel that their scriptures testified of him (Jn. 5:39–40), he was warning them that *he* was the point of the scriptures that they claimed to love.

The entire Bible – indeed life itself – is pointless without the Son. The Son is the one who gives meaning to Abraham’s circumcision, and Moses’ law, and Joshua’s possession of Canaan’s land, and the labors and sufferings of the saints. The Son is the wisdom in Solomon’s proverbs and the music in David’s songs. He is the reason Job waited, and Daniel prayed, and Jeremiah wept, and Abraham left his homeland and kindred to find a city “whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:8–10). The Son is the reason for every element of the Old Testament. God designed it all to proclaim His Son, but in shadows and figures that men could not then understand.

But we know him! He is our rainbow set in the heavens, a living promise that we will never be destroyed. He is our Passover Lamb, whose blood is spread on the doorposts of our hearts. He is our Melchizedek, meeting us with bread and wine to bless us. He is our David, sitting on the throne in heaven. He is our Joshua, giving us our eternal possession. He is our Jonah, back from three days in hell. He is our Noah, preparing a way to escape the coming wrath of God. He is our Adam, the first of a new race and of the nation “born in one day.” He is our Star who came from Jacob (Num. 24:17), guiding us through the darkness of this world. He is our Sun, who rose from the grave “with healing in his wings” (Mal. 4:2). By the grace of God, we see the Son everywhere that God placed a sign of him, and that is in every utterance of the prophets, every ceremony of the law, and every ancient story of faith.





Chapter 5

Two Kinds of Righteousness

... being ignorant of God's righteousness,
and striving to maintain their own righteousness,
they have not submitted to the righteousness of God.
Romans 10:3

... not having my *own* righteousness, which is of the law,
but that *which is* by the faith of Christ,
the righteousness of God that is based on faith.
Philippians 3:9

KINDS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Everyone who truly believes that *all* wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ believes whatever Christ says. Many in this world feel sure there are truths about God that are fully knowable without the Son, but that unfounded confidence is just the product of human pride. Furthermore, such confidence is a rejection of the true God because it is a denial of the necessity of the Son who truly reveals Him. James said that to break one of God's commandments is to be guilty of breaking them all (Jas. 2:10). Likewise, if we think we can understand *anything* about God without His Son, we are guilty of thinking we can know *everything* about God without him. The world has always imagined God as just a big one of us and, so, has imagined that our kind of life is sufficient to comprehend Him. It is not.

To make us free from our darkness, Jesus first must make us willing to be free. He must help us to sense our bondage to the flesh and our need of a new life, and when that is done, we become willing to hear him instead of trusting our own opinions. Then we are made free by the truth he speaks (Jn. 8:32). It is not at all that we are liberated by abandoning our own thoughts and ways; that suggests that we can be liberated by our own will and effort. On our own, we cannot escape our own thoughts and ways because we cannot stop being who we are. But with the sword of truth about God, Jesus comes and breaks off the chains of our own thoughts and ways, and he is the only one who can do it.

Before the Son was revealed, animals, men, and angels had their own God-given kinds of wisdom and knowledge. God had given men, for example, knowledge of how to sow and harvest crops (Isa. 28:24–29). But Paul was referring to *God's* kind of wisdom and knowledge

when he said that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in the Son (Col. 2:3). Paul's statement means that before the Son was revealed, nobody possessed *any* of God's kind of wisdom and knowledge, and even now, without the Son, nobody possesses any. Extreme as it may sound, that statement is a fundamental element of the gospel.

Both my congregation and I had questions on this point. We wondered how there could have been *no* knowledge of God until the Son was revealed if God spoke to people in ancient time, as He did, and told them what was good and what was evil. What we learned as we studied these things is that there is a vast difference between being *told* what is good and evil and having a nature that *senses* what is good and evil without being told. The former produces the righteousness of man; the latter is the righteousness of God. The former can prick someone's conscience if he acts contrary to what he is told, but the latter empowers people to live according to the will of God to begin with. These are the two kinds of righteousness found in the scriptures: man's and God's.

We saw in Chapter 2 that there are various kinds of life and that God's kind of life is different from and superior to all others. The same is true of all that pertains to God's life. There is no goodness like God's kind of goodness, no wisdom like His wisdom, no power like His power, and no righteousness like His righteousness. *Everything about God is unique because His kind of life is unique.*

In the Old Testament, people were righteous if they did what the law said was good and refrained from what the law said was evil. That is man's righteousness. But in this covenant, people are considered righteous only if their nature is changed to be like God's so that they have in their hearts the kind of righteousness that God has in His heart. Jesus compared his Father's righteousness to man's in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5

- 21. You have heard that it was said to those of ancient time, "You shall not murder," and "Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the Judgment."
- 22a. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother without cause shall be liable to the Judgment.
- ...
- 27. You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery,"
- 28. but I say to you that every man who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Many in Israel considered Jesus to be cursed by God (Isa. 53:4), but only because they did not have God's kind of wisdom and righteousness. They also judged him to be unfit to live (Mt. 26:65–66), as they later did to those who followed him into God's righteousness (Acts 7:57–60; 22:22). Their judgment of what was unrighteous was itself unrighteous in God's eyes, for God's kind of righteousness was part of the "wisdom and knowledge" hidden within God's heart until it was revealed by the Son.

"HOLY, JUST, AND GOOD"

Nothing was wrong with the law that God gave Moses. Men were far better off with it than without it. As Paul said, the law was "holy, just, and good" (Rom. 7:12). No matter how holy,

just, or good the law was, however, it could not make the people to whom God gave it holy, just, and good because the law was not a part of their corrupt nature and had no power to change it; it simply told them what to do. What the law told people to do was right, but the fact that it *had* to tell them what to do was the problem. When Jesus came, he told his followers to “be perfect, just as your Father who is in heaven is perfect” (Mt. 5:48). But people could not *live* God’s kind of life without *having* God’s kind of life. People without God’s life can believe that God exists; they can speculate on God’s nature, admire His works, and behave according to a set of rules. But obedience to a set of rules, even if they are divinely revealed rules, is *our* kind of righteousness. Moses plainly told Israel that obedience to the law’s rites and rules would only produce their own kind of righteousness:

Deuteronomy 6

25. It will be our righteousness if we are careful to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as He commanded us.

God’s kind of righteousness has nothing to do with obeying rules, and only after God shared His kind of life with people could they go beyond *acting* holy to *being* holy as God is holy. The best that Moses could do was to command Israel to be holy *because* God was holy (Lev. 11:44–45; 20:7) and to be perfect *with* God (Dt. 18:13); that is, to keep His rules perfectly. But the Son of God commanded men to be perfect *the same way* God is perfect (Mt. 5:48), and by walking in the kind of life that he brought them, they could do it! It was only after receiving God’s kind of life that John could have made this arresting statement: “As He is, so are we in this world” (1Jn. 4:17).

Jesus promised that he and the Father would come and dwell within those who believe on him (Jn. 14:23), and when, by the Spirit, they come in, they bring their clean desires into our hearts, along with their pure, wise thoughts. Moreover, they give us the power to put those divine feelings and thoughts into action. That is God’s righteousness. God is good! He knew that we could not, with our kind of life, be holy as He is holy, and so He sent His Son to make a way for us to partake of His perfect, holy life!

Paul summed up the matter when he said that if we “walk in *the* Spirit”, we will not live as our corrupt human nature would make us live (Gal. 5:16). In other words, when we receive and live in God’s kind of life, we do what is right because His life senses what is good and empowers us to do it. In the life of God is “love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, faith, meekness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23). *God’s life is the law of His kingdom*. It is better than any written law, even a “holy, just, and good” one. It is the “perfect law of liberty”, and it is “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” which liberates us from the bondage of sin (Jas. 1:25; 2:12; Rom. 8:2).

“ALL TRUTH”

While here on earth, the Son of God was as helpless as Moses’ law was in imparting to people the nature and knowledge of God because he, like the law, was on the outside of them. Even though the disciples were obeying the commandments of the law and the commandments of the Lord Jesus, they were still living in their own righteousness because they were still being told what to do. No matter how many years Jesus might have stayed among them, as long as

they did not have the kind of life that he had, they would have remained ignorant of God, and Jesus would have remained a mystery to them. Jesus had to return to the Father to offer himself to Him as a sacrifice for man's sin in order to procure for man God's kind of life. "It is necessary that I go away," Jesus explained to his disciples, "for if I do not go away, the comforter will not come" (Jn. 16:7):

John 14

- 25. I have spoken these things to you, being with you,
- 26. but the comforter, the holy Spirit which the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things, and it will bring to your remembrance everything that I have told you.

Later that same night, Jesus also said that when the Spirit came, it would "guide you into all truth" (Jn. 16:13a). Jesus said "all truth" because everything true about God is communicated to the heart of man by the Spirit of God. Without the Spirit, God's life, no one can either know or please God (1Cor. 2:11–12; Rom. 8:7–9a). And because the entrance of the Spirit re-creates people and enables them to know and to please God, Jesus' promise of God's Spirit to those who believe in him is the most precious promise ever made to mankind. With the guidance of that holy life, one can experience what it is like to distinguish truth from error, and to sense what is good and evil, without being told, just like our heavenly Father! John spoke of the wonder of such a life, free from the bondage of rites and rules when he wrote,

1John 2

- 27a. The anointing that you received from him remains in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you, but the anointing itself teaches you concerning all things, and it is true; it is not a lie.

God could have given a million rules through Moses, and sent a million prophets, and His Son could have stayed here among us a million years, but without God sharing His kind of life with us, we would never have known Him. People under the law could do what God told them to do, and thus, be "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and judgments of the LORD blamelessly" (Lk. 1:6). Still, under a "law of commandments contained in ordinances" (Eph. 2:15), the fear of making oneself a sinner by breaking one of His rules was an inescapable fact of life (Heb. 2:14–15), and a soul in that state is not walking in God's kind of righteousness.

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS: NO RITES OR RULES

It was only to prepare men to receive His kind of righteousness that God gave them the rites and rules of Moses' law. That law enabled people to attain to the height of their own kind of righteousness; it revealed to them a better way of living than they could ever have devised for themselves. Paul said that if there ever was a law that could have made men truly righteous, Moses' law would have done it (Gal. 3:21), and every soul that walked humbly before God under Moses' law was prepared to receive His Spirit when the Son was revealed.

By receiving God's kind of life, humans partook of God's nature (2Pet. 1:4), and it is God's nature to live righteously without ceremonial rites and without rules. God needs no rites or rules

to guide Him because God is naturally holy, and those who receive His kind of life and walk in it do not need rites and rules, either. God's righteousness is rite-lessness, and in His kingdom, an unruly person is someone who demands his rites and lives according to rules.

Paul told the saints, "Walk in *the* Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). He did not say, "Keep the rules, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh" because he knew that he himself carried out the desires of his flesh while he was keeping the rules (Rom. 7:5–23). He spent his entire life in Christ trying to persuade believers to honor God by living and worshipping "in spirit and in truth", without rites or rules. In the end, Paul failed in that mission; or rather, God's people failed to grasp what Paul was trying so hard to tell them. The "new and living way" of the Spirit, the way of living holy without performing ceremonies or following a set of instructions, was the essence of Paul's gospel for the Gentiles. Those who "walk in the Spirit" live in fellowship with God's feelings and thoughts.

The Father wrought an astonishing change in the hearts of men when He gave them His kind of life on the day of Pentecost. Nobody but God could have done it. Nobody but God even knew it needed to be done. Not one Old Testament prophet or wise man ever spoke of entering "the kingdom of God" or tried to explain "the righteousness of God". They did not understand the uniqueness of God's kind of life or the kind of kingdom or righteousness, or the kind of grace, or love, or mercy involved in that life. Standing in Pontius Pilate's court, Jesus testified, "My kingdom is not of this world," but Pilate did not believe that Jesus was a king. Jesus certainly didn't look like a king or act like any king Pilate had ever known. Ancient people honored God as a king (Ps. 5:2), even as a great king (Ps. 47:2); still, to their minds, He was the kind of king they already understood. They knew that God was righteous (Ps. 119:137), even that He was the most righteous of all (Pss. 36:6; 111:3), but they thought He was most righteous with the kind of righteousness they already knew about. Everything of God, His grace, His kingdom, His righteousness, His love, His wisdom, etc., was completely unknown in heaven and earth until the Son of God came and revealed it.

HUMAN RIGHTEOUSNESS: RITES AND RULES

Adam and Eve were not made sinful by eating the forbidden fruit and obtaining "the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:16–17; 3:6–7, 22). They ate the fruit and obtained that knowledge because they had already become sinful. Sin is a matter of the heart, and their choice to disobey God was the sin. The knowledge that entered into Adam and Eve when they ate the forbidden fruit was indeed knowledge, but it did nothing to deliver them from the sinfulness into which they had fallen. Their hearts remained the same. Similarly, the knowledge of good and evil that Israel obtained by the law was real knowledge, but it also did nothing to deliver them from their sinful nature. Neither the kind of knowledge that Adam and Eve received (from the fruit) nor the kind of knowledge Israel received from the law was evil. After all, God Himself possessed all that knowledge. In both cases, it was human sinfulness, not the source or the kind of knowledge that was the problem.

Romans 7

7. What, then, shall we say? "The law is sin"? Absolutely not! On the contrary, I would not have understood sin, were it not for the law. For

example, I would not have known covetousness, had the law not said, “You shall not covet.”

...

12. Therefore, the law is indeed holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.

...

- 14b. But I am carnal, sold under sin.

Children, in their innocence, are in some measure clean before God. Jesus even said that we must become like innocent children if we hope to ever see God’s kingdom (Mt. 18:1–3). But when young children in Israel came of age and learned from the law what sin was, they realized their guiltiness before God and “died” to their innocence. Paul described how this happened to him:

Romans 7

9. I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.
 10. And then, the very commandment that *was ordained* for life was found by me *to be* for death.

The holy commandments of the law were contrary to man’s sinful nature; therefore, regardless of how precisely anyone kept the law’s rules, that kind of righteousness was man’s righteousness, a righteousness based on proper form. God’s righteousness, on the other hand, is a righteousness *by nature*. Moses and the prophets longed for the day when the inward parts of man would be circumcised instead of just the outside (Dt. 10:16; Jer. 4:4), but for that, the Son would have to come to earth, take on flesh, suffer and die, and then ascend to offer himself to the Father for us.

The law of Moses, being outside of man, could not sanctify human nature. Even if someone kept the commandments perfectly, that obedient soul could not escape another danger – the danger of becoming proud of being good. Nobody walking in God’s kind of life ever becomes proud of being good, however, for pride is not in God’s kind of righteousness.

RELIGIOUS PRIDE

God’s people who had the law of Moses sometimes became so proud of knowing the law that they lost sight of the need to actually keep it:

Romans 2

17. Behold! You call yourself a Jew, and you rest in the law, and boast in God,
 18. and you know *the divine* will, and being instructed by the law, you approve excellent things,
 19. and you have convinced yourself that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those in darkness,
 20. an instructor of the ignorant, a teacher of little children, possessing the form of the knowledge and the truth *that is* in the law.

21. Now then, O teacher of others, do you not teach yourself? O man who preaches not to steal, do you steal?
22. O man who says not to commit adultery, do you commit adultery? O man who abhors idols, do you rob the temple?
23. O man who boasts in the law, do you dishonor God by transgressing the law?
24. For “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,” as it is written.

Religious pride is the most difficult kind of pride for men to see because it is based on doing good, not evil, and upon obeying what God has commanded, not rejecting it. The reason Jesus told the devout leaders of Israel that “harlots will go into the kingdom of God before you” (Mt. 21:31) is that harlots know they are sinners and, so, are much more likely to repent when called upon by God to do so. The Son of God said he came into this world to bring sight to the blind, but the Pharisees claimed not to be blind to the things of God, and so, Jesus let them know that he did not come for them. He told them, “You say, ‘We see’; therefore, your sin remains” (Jn. 9:41). And Jesus told some Pharisees on another occasion, “Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but those who are sick” (Lk. 5:31).

Israel’s leaders had no means of overcoming religious pride once it took root in their hearts because it grew greater the more they performed the law’s ceremonies and the more they glorified God for giving the law to them instead of to any other nation. But for those without God’s life, obedience to the law made for a deadly trap of pride, and as a young man, Paul fell into it. Before Jesus met him on the road to Damascus, Paul zealously observed the precepts of the law, and he despised those who did not. Every time young Paul obeyed God’s commandment not to steal, he became prouder for not being a thief. Each Sabbath day Paul observed made him prouder of being an observer of the Sabbath and more contemptuous of those who were not observers of it. Afterward, as an apostle, Paul described what had happened to him:

Romans 7

- 8a. Sin, taking advantage of the commandment, produced in me every evil passion.
- ...
11. Sin, taking advantage of the commandment, deceived me, and with it, killed me.

AN EXAMPLE OF RELIGIOUS PRIDE

This is the story of two women from my hometown, both of them about five years older than I. One of them, Victoria, I knew from my earliest years, and the other, Sadie, I met only after I had married and moved to another city.⁵⁰

It was a pleasure getting to know Sadie. She believed in Jesus and was a happy person with a good understanding of spiritual things. Although her husband was not a believer, they had been happily married since before they graduated from high school, and they had successfully reared two children. Sadie had been filled with the Spirit years before I met her, and not long after we

⁵⁰ These are not their real names.

met, she began attending our home prayer meetings and eventually became a part of our family in Christ. One day as Sadie and I talked, she told me that she remembered Victoria from high school. They had not been close friends, but they were in the same graduating class.

Upon learning that, I looked forward to seeing Victoria again. Only occasionally did I see her after she moved from our hometown, but I wanted to be the first to tell her the good news, that I had met her former classmate Sadie and that Sadie was filled with the Spirit and serving Christ.

Victoria had always been a morally upright person. She was filled with the Spirit while in college, and in her spiritual journey, she had become an exemplary Christian, an outstanding member of a large church in her community. She and her husband were nearing retirement, both having enjoyed successful careers. Their only child was now grown, as were Sadie's two children.

Months passed before I finally saw Victoria again, at a function in my hometown. I was excited for the chance to tell her the good news about Sadie. After some small talk, I told Victoria that I had met a lady named Sadie with whom she had graduated from high school and that she was now serving Christ and – I had hardly gotten those words out of my mouth when Victoria shot back a cold response that floored me. Actually, she replied so quickly that it was as if she had been waiting for decades for someone to mention Sadie's name. She turned her head and said, "She got pregnant in high school." That was all. And her expression made it clear that she did not want to hear anything else about that sinner. I was left speechless. Victoria exhibited no joy or thankfulness that her former schoolmate had been born again and was happy in Jesus. Her demeanor did not suggest the slightest interest in Sadie's wonderful story, whom she obviously still thought of as a "bad girl". I stood there, wondering what to do or say next. Victoria turned and continued mingling pleasantly with others, as if nothing had even happened.

Jesus revealed that the angels in heaven rejoice greatly when a sinner repents (Lk. 15:10); however, in a heart filled with self-righteous pride, no such joy is ever felt. It is a wonderful thing that Victoria had kept herself pure as a young woman. I encourage all young people to be morally upright. But it would have been better for her to have committed fornication a thousand times than for her to be so proud of never committing fornication that she would sneer at a soul that Jesus loved and had made pure by his blood.

We are not righteous in God's sight because of sins we do not commit. That is *our* kind of righteousness, the kind we can achieve with our own kind of life, provided that we have the willpower to obey the accepted rules for conduct and worship. If righteousness is based on not committing sins and not transgressing the commandments, then very old trees and buildings are more righteous than any living person, for they have been here longer and have never transgressed any commandment of God. It is exactly as Paul said – no flesh can boast before God (1Cor. 1:29). We are righteous in God's sight only as we live in His kind of life, doing as His holy Spirit leads us to do. According to the apostle Paul, those who live like that are the only children God acknowledges as His (Rom. 8:14).

If you have done a good deed today, or have thought a good thought, or have felt a right attitude, be thankful for it and give God the praise. He is the giver of every good and perfect gift (Jas. 1:17), and every time He imparts a holy desire to us so that we do what is good in His sight,

He deserves our praise. Without Him, we cannot do, say, or think anything that is holy, just, and good. Jesus said so:

John 15

4. Stay in me, as I *will* in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it stays on the vine, so neither can you, unless you stay in me.
5. I am the vine; you, the branches. He who stays in me, and I in him, bears much fruit. Without me, you can do nothing.

FILTHY GARMENTS

By the time of Jesus, the religious leaders of Israel were, like Victoria, extremely proud of their faithfulness in following the rules. No group on earth was more attentive to rules or trusted more in ceremonial correctness. It was obvious to the common folk in Israel that they would never be as righteous as the strict scribes and Pharisees, and Jesus' disciples must have been stunned when he told them, "Unless your righteousness far exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:20). They must have wondered how they could possibly be more fastidious than the scribes and Pharisees in keeping the rites and rules of the law. The answer was that they could not, and in their hearts they knew it. Jesus knew it, too, but he also knew that another kind of righteousness was coming which would so far exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees that it would expose their kind of righteousness to be as worthless "as filthy garments" (Isa. 64:6).

On the day of Pentecost, when the disciples received the baptism of God's life, they were re-created with power to keep God's law the way God had always wanted His people to keep it – "in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4:24). From that day on, Jesus' disciples walked in God's kind of righteousness, and *that* kind of righteousness most certainly did "far exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees." That is why men like young Paul persecuted those who received God's life. They saw in those believers a kind of life that was contrary to the law, as they understood it. But it was not contrary to the law, it only exceeded the law, and when Paul received that life himself, he stopped persecuting the saints and became, himself, a saint who was persecuted.

2Corinthians 11

24. Five times I received forty *lashes*, minus one, at the hands of the Jews;
25. three times, I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a day and a night I have spent in the deep;
26. on frequent journeys, in dangers on rivers, in dangers from bandits, in dangers from my *own* race, in dangers from the Gentiles, in dangers in the city, in dangers in the wilderness, in dangers on the sea, in dangers among false brothers,
27. through toil and hardship, through frequent sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and nakedness.

Paul's claim to have been caught up into heaven to hear directly from God "things which are unlawful for a man to speak" (2Cor. 12:2–4) impressed few people in Paul's day, and it did not save his converts from the powerful influence of Jewish believers who demanded that Gentiles add the rites and rules of Moses' law to their faith. They demanded that Gentile believers live

under the law as the Jews did, and as Jesus had done, and as all of his original disciples were still doing. Paul contended with those Jewish elders, though they were believers, and he fearlessly defended the liberty of Gentile believers from the rites and rules of the law (Acts 15:1–2). Paul refused, for even one hour, to compromise the revelation given to him (Gal. 2:4–5). He himself had given up all confidence in his own righteousness and in the law that promoted it, placing all his hope in Christ:

Philippians 3

7. What things were gain to me, these I have counted as loss for Christ.
8. More than that, I consider all things but loss for the surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have accepted the loss of everything; and I consider *it all* garbage, that I might gain Christ,
9. and be found in him, not having my *own* righteousness, which is of the law, but that *which is* by the faith of Christ, the righteousness of God that is based on faith.

THE GUARDIAN

Paul described the law as “our guardian, until Christ” (Gal. 3:24). Naturally, the Jews, as God’s children, had to obey that guardian (Gal. 5:3), but the gift of the Spirit was God’s testimony that one had matured to the point that the guardian’s work was no longer needed (Gal. 3:25). Jesus did not come to undermine or destroy the law, but to fulfill it (Mt. 5:17), for he was the very point of the law’s instruction. As Paul would say it, when those who were under that guardian’s care believed in Jesus and received God’s life, they “died to” the guardian:

Romans 7

- 4a. My brothers, you are dead to the law through the body of Christ.

Galatians 2

19. Through *the* law, I died to *the* law, that I might live in God.

The Jews in Paul’s time feared that they would face eternal damnation if they attempted to live without that dear old guardian. After all, had not God commanded them to obey the law, on penalty of death? They could not imagine God considering them righteous if they did not keep the law’s rules for conduct and worship. Everyone in Israel, to that point in history, who had disobeyed the law had been condemned and cursed by God, while all who had kept it had been blessed. Who, then, except a fool or a madman, thought that someone could be righteous without observing the law’s rites and rules?

God did.

Jesus once told his disciples, “I have food to eat that you do not know about” (Jn. 4:32), and then he explained, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent me” (Jn. 4:34). Knowing God’s will and having the power to do it is a kind of righteousness about which the whole world, including the disciples, knew nothing. And on the day of Pentecost, when Jesus’ disciples were filled with “the Spirit of life”, they began to live in a kind of righteousness that so far exceeded that of the law that Israel’s elders did not recognize it as righteousness at all. On the contrary, they condemned it.

“THE STRENGTH OF SIN”

The law not only made the greatest human righteousness possible, but it also made possible the greatest human wickedness. The law was given for man’s good, but it was designed by God so that “sin might become exceedingly sinful” (Rom. 7:13), and when the law was given, both human righteousness and human wickedness increased in strength, as Paul suggested when he said, “The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law” (1Cor. 15:56).

How could God’s holy, just, and good law be “the strength of sin”? The answer is that the law itself was not sinful; man was, and the cunning sinfulness embedded in man’s nature used the law to satisfy itself, even taking advantage of men’s desire to do good.

Romans 7

21. I find, then, this law, that evil is present in me even when I desire to do good.
22. With the inner man, I joyfully consent to the law of God,
23. but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and taking me captive to the law of sin that is in my members.

After the Spirit came, believers could at last see what God had seen all along; to wit, sin is so much a part of human nature that even when people followed the law, they could still find themselves opposing God and hating those who were like Him. Paul is the prime example of this, and as a warning to others, he testified about his former self-righteousness and what that self-righteousness had been based upon:

Philippians 3

- 4b. If anyone else thinks *he has cause* to trust in the flesh, I *have* more:
5. circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel; of the tribe of Benjamin; a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee;
6. concerning zeal, persecuting the Assembly *of God*, being blameless according to the righteousness that is in the law.

Note especially that Paul said that even when he was persecuting God’s people, he was blameless according to the righteousness of the law! One of Paul’s major themes throughout his letters is that in spite of how superior to the Gentiles he once felt he was, he and his fellow Jews were by nature no better than they. Sometimes, in fact, Israel was worse than the Gentiles (2Chron. 33:9; Ezek. 16:27). Paul also insisted that no one, Jew or Gentile, can justly boast of being good (1Cor. 1:29) and that God had “locked up everyone together in disobedience so that He might have mercy upon all” (Rom. 11:32). In Romans 3:19, Paul pointed out that the Spirit was speaking of God’s own people, not the Gentiles, when it said through David,

Psalms 14

2. The LORD looked down from heaven upon the sons of man to see if there were any who understood and were seeking God.
3. They all are turned aside; they are all, alike, become filthy; there is no one doing good, not even one!

When Christ revealed himself to Paul, it utterly astounded the zealous young Pharisee to learn that even though he had loved and kept the law from childhood (Acts 26:4–5), he was a

wretched sinner in God's sight, worthy of damnation and in desperate need of mercy. Blameless as he had been in the righteousness of the law, Paul had become a fierce enemy of those who were blameless in the righteousness of God:

Galatians 1

13. You have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, that I ruthlessly and relentlessly persecuted the Assembly *of God*, and was destroying it,
- 14a. but I was advancing in Judaism beyond many my own age in my nation.

Young Paul's respectable kind of wickedness, his self-righteousness, was the same kind of wickedness that motivated the elders of Israel to persecute and kill Jesus. The sin of Israel's self-righteous elders was greater than any sin that the Gentiles, who did not have God's law, could commit, and it was greater than the sins of fellow Jews who did not keep the commandments. Those self-righteous elders condemned others who did not know and keep the law (Jn. 7:49), but drunkards, harlots, and other outcasts in Israel were not the ones who pursued God's servants to destroy them. Only Jewish elders who meticulously kept the law and were proud of it had the strength to commit that degree of wickedness. Those powerful men (Jn. 8:44) were earthly figures of the "wicked spirits among heavenly beings" of which Paul spoke (Eph. 6:12).

Paul, as a young man, and the many others who were like him, were trapped in a sinfulness they did not recognize as sin. And their enormous pride in ceremonial and moral correctness brought them more fully under sin's power every time they obeyed one of God's commandments. The sin that was embedded in their human kind of life shamelessly used the holiest thing on earth, Moses' law, to make them more and more sin's slave. Before Jesus rescued Paul, he and others wanted to do good, but "the passions of the sins which were working through the law in our members bore fruit leading to death" (Rom. 7:5).

The seventh chapter of Romans contains Paul's description of his miserable spiritual condition when he had nothing but rites and rules to live by. Before he received God's life, he said, no matter how much good he wanted to do or how much good he did, his fleshly nature kept him in bondage under an inescapable "law of sin and death". He concluded by saying, "Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24). But then he rejoiced at the answer: "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7:25). Paul went on from there to give his brilliant and thrilling description of the kind of life and liberty from sin that Christ had brought him:

Romans 8

2. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death!
- 3a. You see, what *was* impossible for the law, in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* when He sent His own Son in the form of sinful flesh.

The law was "weak", not because it was wrong but because it was unable to change human nature. Paul's great joy and excitement in Romans 8 was the result of the Spirit of God coming into his heart and re-creating him, changing his nature, and setting him free from the power of the nature of his flesh, which had so long held him captive.

When the followers of Christ received God's kind of life on the day of Pentecost, they not only received power to "far exceed" the scribes and Pharisees in righteousness, but they also received the power to outdo the Pharisees in wickedness if they walked contrary to the life God had given them. Just as the law of Moses empowered men to be more righteous or more wicked than the Gentiles, depending on how they used the law, so the Spirit empowers God's children now to "far exceed" all human righteousness and wickedness. Paul was right to say that God's holy law was the strength of sin. We may also say that under this covenant, God's Spirit increases strength to sin in those who have the Spirit but walk contrary to it, and theirs is worse sin than what was possible under the law. The sin of a believer who is unfaithful to Christ is far greater than the sin of an Israelite who was unfaithful to the law, and such a person is worthy of a far greater damnation because he is being unfaithful to a far holier thing:

Hebrews 10

28. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy, by two or three witnesses.
29. Of how much worse punishment, do you think, will he be worthy who has trampled under foot the Son of God, has esteemed the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and has done outrage to the Spirit of grace?

THE LOST GOSPEL OF PAUL

God used Paul's personal experience with the deceitfulness of sin to teach him that everyone without God's kind of life is helplessly trapped. Even obedience to the holy law that God gave to Israel provided man with no escape from his sinful nature; he was still "sold under sin" (Rom. 7:14). Man was hopeless unless God Himself did something to change him. When God changed Paul, he saw what sin had done to him and what Jesus had rescued him from, and he declared, "We are released from the law . . . so that we might serve *God* in the newness of the Spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter" (Rom. 7:6). By "the letter", Paul meant the law's rules, written out by hand.

When Paul's Gentile converts added the law's ceremonies to their faith, Paul was indignant. He even called on God to damn the men who had taught them to do that (Gal. 5:12). It made no sense for God's Gentile children to perform ceremonies after receiving God's life. Ceremony is imitation of life, and the holy ceremonies of the law were merely imitations of God's life. *God's life is beyond all ceremony.* Neither He nor His Son has ever conducted a ceremony, and Paul warned those dear Gentile believers that they had denied the work of Christ in their souls and had "fallen from grace" when they began adding ceremonies to their faith (Gal. 5:4). What was the point of Gentiles with God's life serving God the way the Jews had always done, argued Paul, if observing the law's rites and rules had not delivered the Jews themselves from the dominion of sin?

Paul's warnings, in the main, fell on deaf ears. Most Gentile believers were persuaded by Jewish teachers to follow the law-keeping example of Jesus and his first apostles. Paul could not convince them that simply walking in God's righteousness, as God does, was all they had to do to please God and obtain eternal life, or that to add ceremonial works was to deny Christ. Eventually, judging by comments Paul made in his old age (2Tim. 1:15), almost everyone Paul

ever led to Christ rejected his gospel of liberty from rites and rules. With tears, he reproved his beloved Galatians for abandoning the simple way of the Spirit:

Galatians 3

- 1a. O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth?
2. This only would I learn of you: Did you receive the Spirit by works of *the* law or by hearing with faith?
3. Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now perfected by the flesh?

Paul insisted that the law was intended only for the nation of Israel (Rom. 3:19), and he condemned as “false brothers” those Jewish teachers who pressured Gentile believers to submit to circumcision (Gal. 2:4). Those teachers were, in Paul’s view, leading God’s children backward into human righteousness again, the kind of righteousness promoted by the law. Once, he even had to rebuke Peter for acting as though Gentile believers were less holy than their physically circumcised brothers:

Galatians 2

11. And when Peter came to Antioch, I withstood him to the face because he stood condemned.
12. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he ate with the Gentiles, but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those of the circumcision.
13. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with Peter, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.
14. But when I saw that they did not walk uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, “If you, being a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, why do you put pressure on the Gentiles to live like Jews?”
15. We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,
16. knowing that a man is not justified by works of *the* law apart from faith in Jesus Christ, even we have trusted in Christ Jesus that we might be justified by *the* faith of Christ and not by works of *the* law, for by works of law shall no flesh be justified!”

Since everyone who is born of God is a new creature, and the old creature he used to be is dead (Rom. 6:6), Paul made the seemingly unnecessary point that when anyone who lived under the law died, he was no longer required to keep the law. When he wrote, “Do you not know, brothers, that the law has dominion over a man as long as he is alive?” (Rom. 7:1), he was reminding them that Moses’ law was only for living people. No dead man was ever forbidden by God to eat pork or touch holy things, nor was any dead man ever commanded to be circumcised, make sacrifices, or keep the Sabbath and the other holy days. So, when Paul’s Gentile converts were persuaded to add the law’s rites and rules to their faith, Paul asked them a penetrating question:

Colossians 2

20. If you are dead with Christ to the elements of the world, why then, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to ordinances, *such as*
21. “Do not touch! Do not taste! Do not handle!”,
- 22b. according to the commandments and doctrines of men?

Paul insisted that those who had been baptized by God’s life into Christ were “complete in him” (Col. 2:10). His gospel for the Gentiles could not have been simpler: “If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law” (Gal. 5:18).

Simple as it is, this foundation of Paul’s gospel has proved to be extremely difficult for God’s children to grasp, even, as we have seen, for those whom Paul personally taught. Human nature, with its addiction to ceremonial form, resists the revelation that walking in the Spirit is all that man needs to do, or can do, to please God. The fleshly nature of man never ceases to demand its rites, and that demand of our flesh is contrary to everything in the life of God.

With an ever-growing number of false teachers making Paul’s doctrine seem wrong, it was very difficult for Paul to establish believers in his gospel of liberty from rites and rules. He could tell them, “I have had a new revelation from Christ” (cp. Gal. 1:11–12), but when he taught the Gentiles that God’s kind of circumcision was now circumcision of the heart by the Spirit (Rom. 2:28–29), false teachers could remind the Gentiles that Christ himself was circumcised (Lk. 2:21). Or when Paul taught that the only baptism that counted in God’s kingdom was the baptism of God’s life (Eph. 4:5; 1Cor. 12:13), false teachers could remind the Gentiles that Christ himself was baptized with water (Mk. 1:9), as were his disciples. Or when Paul said that it was by the power of the Spirit, not by performing ceremonies of the law, that God’s servants healed the sick (Gal. 3:5), false teachers could point out that Jesus commanded those he healed to go to the priests and make the sacrifices that Moses commanded (Lk. 5:12–14).⁵¹ And when Paul taught that holy days were just a shadow of Christ (Col. 2:16–17), false teachers could point out that Christ himself kept the feasts (Jn. 7:1, 10, 37). Moreover, Jesus’ original disciples, most of whom were still alive when Paul was sent to preach his gospel, were still keeping the law, along with all other Jewish believers. During Paul’s last visit to Jerusalem, decades after Pentecost, James told him, “You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews who believe, and they are all zealous for the law” (Acts 21:20). When some leaders argued that all believers had to keep the law as Jesus did and that Paul was out of his mind to teach otherwise, Paul was prepared:

2Corinthians 5

13. If we be out of our minds, *it is* to God, or if we be in our right minds, *it is* to you.
14. The love of Christ compels us, once we conclude this, that inasmuch as one man died for all, all were dead.
- ...

⁵¹ Instead of going to the priest as Jesus commanded, one of the ten lepers Jesus cleansed returned to thank him – and Jesus was pleased (Lk. 17:12-19)! This was a clue that Jesus was living a kind of life beyond mere obedience to the law, but at the time, none of his followers could have perceived it.

16. Therefore, from now on, we know no one after the flesh. Though we have known even Christ after the flesh, yet now, we no longer know *him that way*.
17. Therefore, if anyone *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature. Old things are gone; behold, all things are new.

Paul's revelation was that all mankind was now required by God to reverence His Son as Lord of heaven and earth, not just as the Jewish Messiah. His revelation was that the resurrected Jesus, sitting now at God's right hand, ministers to mankind through the Spirit, not through the law and the elements of the world. It is true that Jesus submitted to the ceremonial rites of the law while he was here in the flesh, but as Paul insisted, "we no longer know him that way." Paul's gospel tasted bitter to those who would not humble themselves to the invisible righteousness of God because they could not make an impressive show of it (cp. Gal. 6:12). But for souls who were hungering and thirsting for true life, Paul's gospel was incomparably simple and sweet. Here are a few of its basic elements:

- Moses' law never applied to dead men.
- Christ Jesus died.
- Whoever is "in Christ" is "dead with Christ".
- Therefore, rites and rules do not apply to those who are in Christ. They are free to live according to their new nature.

GOD'S LOVE FOR THE JEWS

When James told Paul that "many thousands" of Jews with God's life were still keeping the law, he was not describing rebellious believers. James understood that it was God's will at that time for Jewish believers to continue keeping Moses' law. God had a loving purpose for the law to remain in effect for the Jews after giving them His life. He wanted the Jews who had received His life to be effective witnesses to the Jews who had not yet received it, and He knew that if those with His life quit keeping the law, the other Jews would be offended. So, God's love for all the Jews compelled the Jews who had received His life to continue keeping the law for the sake of the Jews who had not yet received it. That is, in fact, the same reason Jesus himself kept the law. If he had not done so, his own disciples would have abandoned him. Because Jesus had God's kind of life within him, he had no need of the law's rites and rules. At the same time, that same life compelled him to love those in bondage enough to bind himself with them, and to make a way for them to be free.

However, even though Jesus kept the law for the sake of his beloved fellow Jews, many of them cursed him, thought him insane (Mk. 3:21), and accused him of being demon-possessed (Jn. 8:48). How much worse would it have been for Jesus if, in addition to what he was already teaching and doing, Jesus had preached, as Paul later did, that the law was useless for obtaining true righteousness (Rom. 10:4)? This was part of what Jesus had in mind when he told his disciples, "I have many things to tell you, but you are not able to bear them now" (Jn. 16:12). That truth was almost too much for them to bear even years after Pentecost, when Jesus sent Paul with his gospel. Paul's gospel declared that God's kind of life sets souls free from rites and rules, even the rites and rules that God Himself commanded in the law of Moses. And he exhorted his

converts to “stand fast in the liberty with which Christ has made us free, and do not submit again to a yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1).

To preach that gospel of liberty from works, God needed a man who had not walked with Jesus. Walking with Jesus and observing the law with him had made the disciples doubly sure that God required those who believed in His Son to keep the law, just as Jesus did. Paul’s doctrine of liberty from the rites and rules of the law was clearly contrary to the way that the Son of God lived while he was on earth; at the same time, Paul knew that to provide us with that liberty was the Son’s very purpose for coming.

PRIDE AND FEAR

The Jews’ pride in their own kind of righteousness, the righteousness which was by the law, was matched by their fear of being without it. But such pride and fear were not unique to the Jews; it is the common lot of man. Religious leaders of all cultures have always instilled pride in people for being righteous and threatened them with damnation if they were not. Virtually everybody who has ever lived on this planet has been taught that damnation awaits those who are not righteous, which helps explain why so few have ever answered God’s call to forsake their own righteousness. The standard of righteousness given to the Jews was unique among the nations because that standard came from the true God. Still, the Jews shared all of mankind’s pride in maintaining their own kind of righteousness and all of mankind’s fear of damnation for failure to do so.

A few days before his crucifixion, Jesus stood within the gates of Jerusalem and grieved because the Jews were so addicted to their own kind of righteousness that they would not embrace the kind of righteousness that God had sent him to show them (Mt. 23:37). The apostle Paul had once been a prime example of Jewish resistance to God’s righteousness, but when he received God’s kind of righteousness and was delivered from his pride and fear, he grieved for his fellow Jews, just as Jesus did. He wrote, “I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart . . . for my brothers, my kinsmen in the flesh, who are the Israelites” because “being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and striving to maintain their own righteousness, they have not submitted to the righteousness of God” (Rom. 9:2–4; 10:3).

Jesus’ disciples were already righteous by the law’s standard when Jesus told them that they must seek “the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Mt. 6:33). Seeking is all they could do at the time, however. Neither God’s kingdom nor His righteousness was available. “The kingdom of God is . . . righteousness, and peace, and joy in the holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17), and the awful price for the Spirit to come was not paid until Jesus paid it.

Moses’ law provided great benefits to Israel (Rom. 9:4–5), and tragic events always befell the nation when its leaders led the people away from the law’s righteousness. In forsaking the law before the time appointed by the Father, Israel and its leaders became even more confused about good and evil than they, by nature, were. Paul’s testimony of being misled as a youth by his elders is not a rare one in Israel’s history. The Bible is replete with stories of God’s children trusting spiritually blind leaders and then doing evil, sometimes great evil, thinking that they were doing good. God was furious with those “blind guides”: “The leaders of this people make *them* err, and those who are led by them are ruined” (Isa. 9:16).

As holy and good as the law was, however, Israel's prophets foretold the coming of a day when the law's kind of righteousness would end (e.g., Isa. 64:6; 66:1–3), but they did not know that it would be God's kind of righteousness coming to men that would end it. Paul explained:

Romans 3

- 21. The righteousness of God without the law has been revealed, being borne witness by the law and the prophets,
- 22a. even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith in Jesus Christ, to all and upon all who believe.
- ...
- 27. Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? [i.e., of rites and rules?] No! But by the law of faith!
- 28. Therefore, we conclude that a man is made righteous by faith without the works of the law.

To partake of God's kind of righteousness was beyond the wildest dreams of man. The rites and rules of the law were intended to prepare Israel to receive that blessing, but in the end, the very things that God gave Israel to lead them to that blessing became their prison. The law became their idol, and that dead idol would not allow them to receive the Messiah of whom it spoke. They loved the law more than they loved the Son, and so, their temple and their holy days, their priesthood and sacrifices, their lovely candlestick and golden table became their prison, their curse. The persecuted Son is the one who asked the Father for this justice:

Psalm 69

- 19. You know my reproach, and my shame, and my disgrace. All those who torment me are before you.
- 20. Reproach has broken my heart, and I am in despair. I longed for *someone* to pity *me*, but there was no one, and for comforters, but I found none.
- 21. They gave *me* gall for my food, and in my thirst, they made me drink vinegar.
- 22. Let their table become a snare for them, and *their* peace offerings, a trap.

The liberty that Paul preached was the liberty from ignorance and weakness. It was the gift of the knowledge of God's will and the strength to do it. In a powerful sermon in the 1970s, Preacher Clark summarized Paul's message this way: "God can't use you as long as you are going by a set of rules. I don't care whose rules they are. God is going to give you His law now, today, and His law will be in your heart. It will make you free from the law of sin and death, and you will be willing and able to do whatever God wants you to do, without a set of rules to go by." The liberty that God's life brings is an incomparably glorious liberty, as joyous to the souls who enter into it as it is strange and frightening to the souls who will not.

The Son of God came to set us free from our fear of breaking a rule and being damned (Heb. 2:15). He did this by recreating us as people to whom rules and rites do not apply, as holy people who live under "a perfect law of liberty", "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus". All we have to do to keep this law is to walk in the kind of life we have received, the life that

knows no rules, and fears nothing but the God who gave it, our heavenly Father who loves us so much that He sent His Son to die in our stead.





Chapter 6

“All Wisdom and Knowledge”

... the mystery of God, even of the Father and Christ,
in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
Colossians 2:2b–3

“BOTH GOOD AND EVIL”

The truth that the Son reveals makes people free (Jn. 8:31–32), but the truth he reveals is the knowledge of both good *and* evil, and we must see them both as God sees them in order to see either of them rightly. Even when they were giving close heed to the law and the prophets, it was impossible for the Israelites ever to know if a particular deed was good or evil because no deed is either always good or always evil. Sometimes, prayer is good (Prov. 15:8), but prayer can also be evil (Prov. 28:9). Sometimes, killing is evil (Ex. 20:13) but killing can also be good (1Sam. 15:32–33). One of Israel’s kings sinned by showing mercy at the wrong time to the wrong person (1Kgs. 20:30–43), as Israel’s first king, Saul, had also done (1Sam. 15:2–3, 8). But Joab, King David’s general, sinned by *not* showing mercy when he should have (2Sam. 3:27–28; 20:9–10). Worshipping God can be good, but sometimes, worship disgusts God (Amos 5:21–24; Isa. 1:11–17). Cruelty is usually evil, but God Himself can be cruel (Isa. 13:9; Jer. 30:14). So, who knows when praying or showing mercy is evil? And who knows when killing and cruelty are good? We must have God’s kind of life as an internal guide to let us know what is good and what is evil in any given situation.

Appearances can deceive, as the old saying goes, and humans without the spiritual discernment of God’s kind of life within them are routinely deceived by appearances. That is the normal course of human life. Jesus warned us that the final test of God’s people on earth will be the appearance of a very great evil that seems to be so good that if it were possible, it would deceive even the very elect of God (Mt. 24:24). The “elect” are those believers who have learned to rely on the Spirit’s judgment instead of their own. Otherwise, they would be as helpless in discernment as anyone else and would not be “the elect”. Jesus’ warning is for all of humanity, and it is clear. The only two options anyone has are (1) learn to rely on the Spirit of God for judging matters or (2) be deceived by something evil that appears to be good.

The process of maturing in the life of God is not complicated. It is simply a process of learning to trust the feelings and thoughts that dwell in our hearts after we receive God's kind of life. Doing that is how we "walk in the Spirit". God's feelings and thoughts purge us of wrong ideas passed on to us by our elders or that we have absorbed from our culture. Paul prayed that God's children would continue in the faith long enough to "attain to . . . the knowledge of the Son of God, to perfect manhood, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph. 4:13), for only those who grow in grace after being born of God ever really come to know their Father:

Hebrews 5

13. Everyone who lives on milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is an infant,
14. but solid food is for those fully grown, those who by experience have the senses trained to discern both good and evil.

THE WHEAT AND THE TARES

Usually, good and evil are associated only with life on earth, but with the revelation of the Son came the knowledge that until Satan and his angels were cast out, good and evil were in heaven, too. In God's very presence was hypocrisy as well as sincerity, lies as well as truth, and pride as well as humility. In short, both true and false religion were in heaven. Nothing but goodness exists in heaven now, but as long as the Son remained hidden, evil was in God's presence continually, in the hearts of Satan and myriads of angels. Moreover, as long as both good and evil were in heaven, the hearts of heavenly creatures were being tried, as the hearts of God's people on earth are being tried now.

With his parable of the Wheat and the Tares, Jesus was not merely telling his disciples that they would have to deal with good and evil here on earth. He was teaching them how the Father had been dealing with good and evil in heaven for a very long time.

Matthew 13

24. Another parable he put before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.
25. But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares in among the wheat, and then went away.
26. And when the crop sprouted and produced fruit, the tares also appeared.
27. Then the landowner's slaves came to him and said, 'Master, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Then, where did the tares come from?'
28. He said to them, 'An enemy did this.' Then the slaves said to him, 'So, do you want us to go out and pull them up?'
29. But he replied, 'No, lest in gathering up the tares, you uproot the wheat with them.
30. Let both grow together until the harvest, and in the time of harvest, I will tell the reapers, "Gather up the tares first and bind them into bundles to burn them up; then gather the wheat into my storehouse."'"

In this parable, the owner of the wheat field (God) would not allow his slaves (His ministers) to pull up the bad plants (the ungodly) until the time of harvest. Throughout the growing season,

the owner's protection and care of the wheat in his field was also a blessing for the tares. Rains fell and the sun shone on wheat and tares alike, and the owner patiently watched over them all, "waiting for the precious fruit of the earth." Before the harvest, an unknowing observer might have thought that the owner of the field valued the tares as much as he did the wheat. But at the time of harvest, the owner at last showed that he hated the tares and loved the wheat, for he commanded his slaves to pull up the tares and burn them, but to gather his wheat into his storehouse.

God has not changed since the time Jesus told this parable. With Him, "there is no variation, nor shadow of change" (Jas. 1:17). He is still patiently tolerating many wayward souls, but this time, they are among His earthly sons. The "tares" are still being blessed along with the wheat. That is why an unknowing observer might think that God values the ungodly among His people as much as He does the godly, for they all, at present, are being blessed together. But at "the time of harvest" (the return of the Lord Jesus), God will again show that He hates the tares and loves His wheat. Ungodly believers will be removed from among His people and thrown into the fire, while the upright will be gathered into the safety of the Father's presence (Mt. 13:40–43).

Jesus' parable of the Wheat and the Tares reveals a most terrifying aspect of God's nature; namely, His extraordinary patience. God's patience is terrifying because when God is silent in the face of wickedness, His patience can be mistaken for approval. *When God does not give immediate vent to His wrath against sin, the foolish assume there is no wrath to fear.* Solomon noted the human tendency to increase in sinfulness when punishment for sin was not swiftly administered. He said, "Because sentence against evildoing is not carried out quickly, the heart of the children of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11). The goodness of God, which includes His patience, creates a testing ground for the heart. God "makes His sun to rise upon the evil and the good, and sends rain upon the just and the unjust" (Mt. 5:45b) so that they both may grow according to what they are. The wise are motivated by God's goodness to fear Him and to grow in grace until the harvest (Rom. 2:4). The foolish, on the other hand, misinterpreting God's goodness, continue in their own ways until the harvest comes and they are destroyed. This is why God's patience is so terrifying; it is easy to misinterpret it, as Satan and his angels did in heaven. Speaking of such tares in the body of Christ on earth, Peter said this:

2Peter 2

- 13b. They are spots and blemishes . . . reveling in their deceits while they feast with you,
- 14. having eyes that are full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, seducing unstable souls, having a heart trained in covetousness. *They are cursed children.*
- 15a. They have forsaken the right way and gone astray.

These "cursed children" of God may *go astray*, but they do not *go away*. They still feast on the things of God with His faithful children. They are the third kind of soil described in Jesus' parable of the Four Kinds of Soil (Mt. 13:3–9, 18–23), and in another parable, they are the "foolish virgins" (Mt. 25:1–13). They have too much love for the world to completely depart from it, and too much love for God to completely depart from Him. They neither repent of their

ungodliness nor leave the congregation of God because, misinterpreting God's patience, they think their kind of righteousness is acceptable. At the same time, God does not allow His ministers to remove them because He has not finished using them. Their spiritual condition is the most dreadful of all.⁵² It is the spiritual condition pioneered by Satan and his angels in heaven.

BASTARDS

As many chastened souls have learned, the Father's chastisement may sting for a while, but it is a precious gift.

Psalm 94

12. Blessed is the man whom you chasten, O LORD, and teach from your law,
13. to make quietness for him during evil times until the pit is dug for the wicked.

For us to refuse God's correction when He offers it leads only to destruction, as Israel's sad story proves.

2Kings 17

- 6a. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away into exile in Assyria.

...

13. Yet, the LORD had testified through every prophet *and* every seer in Israel and in Judah, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments *and* my statutes, according to the whole law that I commanded your fathers and that I sent to you by the hand of my servants the prophets!"
14. But they would not listen, and they stiffened their necks like the necks of their fathers who did not trust in the LORD their God.
15. They rejected His statutes, and His covenant that He made with their fathers, and His testimonies that He testified against them, and they went after vanity and became vain themselves, and followed after the nations that *were* around them, *concerning* whom the LORD had commanded *them* not to do like them.

What happened to the Israelites "happened to them as examples, and they are written for our admonition" (1Cor. 10:11). And what happened to them happened because they refused correction:

Jeremiah 5

3. O LORD, are not your eyes upon the truth? You have stricken them, but they have not grieved; you have consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction. They have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to repent.

⁵² Peter described this spiritual condition as being "tartarized" (2Pet. 2:4), a condition explained in my book, *What the Bible really says about HELL*, available for online reading at GoingtoJesus.com.

Jeremiah 7

28. This is a nation that does not obey the voice of the LORD their God, nor receives correction. Truth has perished, and it is cut off from their mouth.

The northern Kingdom of Israel never stopped worshipping God, even to the very end; they just added other gods to their worship schedule. They did not adhere to the rites and rules of God's law. So, there never was a lack of worship in Israel; there was only a lack of worship according to the will of God.

Seldom, if ever, has a lack of worship existed in heaven or on earth; still, the only worship that God accepts is worship from those who receive His correction and order their lives according to His commandments. Those who continue to worship God after refusing His correction are "bastards", not sons:

Hebrews 12

7. If you endure chastisement, God deals with you as with sons, for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?
8. But if you are without chastisement, of which all have been partakers, then you are bastards, and not sons.

The kingdom of God still has within it many bastards. The only difference between our time and the time before Pentecost is that now, none of those bastards are in heaven.

TARES IN HEAVEN

Satan was created "full of wisdom and perfect in beauty", but he became proud of his gifts (Ezek. 28:12–19) and began to consider himself worthy to share in God's glory. In fact, he became confident that God would at some point elevate him to reign with God over creation. We know this is true because the Son has come and has given us the knowledge of who "light-bringer" is.⁵³ Before the Son was revealed, no one knew. The following prophecy from Isaiah is the only reference in Scripture to the creature called "light-bringer", and those who heard these words could only guess who Isaiah was talking about:

Isaiah 14

12. Oh, how you have fallen from heaven, O light-bringer, son of the dawn!
How you are cut down to the earth, O weakener of the nations!
13. You have said in your heart, "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the Mountain of Assembly, on the far north side.
14. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High."

One popular strand of Christian mythology holds that Satan tried to overthrow God, but that is silly, schoolyard theology. Only humans are so ignorant as to think that the Creator could be overthrown. Satan never thought so. He is "full of wisdom" (Ezek. 28:12), and he knew better. Isaiah's prophecy, above, reveals that it wasn't God's throne that Satan wanted; it was to sit on a

⁵³ The word "Lucifer" is a Latin-based word, not a Hebrew-based one. Moreover, it is not clear that the Hebrew word often translated as "Lucifer" is a proper name at all. That is why I translated it as "light-bringer".

throne beside God, as the one chosen to reign with God. He wanted God's creatures to honor him as they honored God.

Jesus warned his disciples not to covet positions higher than the one appointed to them, concluding with the famous line, "Every one who exalts himself shall be humbled, and the one who humbles himself shall be exalted" (Lk. 14:7–11). Satan did not think the way Jesus did, though, and he strove to attain to a calling which was, for him, impossibly high. But "in the fullness of time", God plucked up the tares that were in heaven's wheat field, a third of the angels, and cast them out of heaven along with Satan (Rev. 12:3–4, 9) because they didn't think the way Jesus did, either.

But how could so many heavenly beings have erred? The answer has already been mentioned many times; to wit, *no one knew God*. Therefore, no one knew what was truly holy and truly good, for God alone is holy (Rev. 15:4), and God alone is good (Mt. 19:17). There must have been times before the Son was revealed when faithful heavenly creatures such as Michael and Gabriel felt uneasy around Satan and the angels who were like him, but without the knowledge of God, they could not have understood why. Michael and Gabriel would have noticed that God's demeanor never changed when those other heavenly beings were present, and He certainly had not cast them out. So, on what basis would they have judged those other heavenly beings to be evil?

Had Satan perceived how God felt about him, he could not have entertained the hope of being exalted to reign with God. With perfect patience, God kept everyone in the dark, for without them realizing it, He was using them all to fulfill His secret purpose; that is, to create the situation in which the Son would be magnified, not Himself. The Father determined that only through His Son would come the true knowledge of God – the knowledge of His power, wisdom, and goodness, the knowledge of His grace, His righteousness, and His kingdom, and not least of all, the knowledge of the very great love which the Father and the Son shared and which they both felt for mankind. There is no such love on earth; it is not a part of our kind of life.

The fact that God had given Satan authority over some of His angels is truth that we know now because the Son of God came and revealed it (Mt. 25:41). Not a shred of historical or biblical evidence suggests that men possessed such knowledge before Jesus came. Men knew from Old Testament scriptures that Satan had authority in God's kingdom but not that he ruled over some of God's angels. Except for about fifteen Old Testament scriptures, Satan is not mentioned in any extant literature from before Jesus' time.⁵⁴

Moses wrote in Genesis of a serpent in the garden of Eden; David and others referred to a powerful heavenly being named Satan; God described to Job a creature called Leviathan, whose heart was "as hard as a millstone"; Isaiah spoke of a "light-bringer" who wanted to be "like the Most High"; and the Spirit spoke through Ezekiel about an anointed cherub who had been in the

⁵⁴ We have no sure record of what rabbis taught about Satan before the Son of God came because the earliest collection of rabbinical teachings comes from the late third century AD. Some Apocryphal works occasionally refer to Satan as evil; however, those texts are corrupt, and references to Satan or "the Accuser" (e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 2:24; The Ascension of Isaiah 2:2; 2Book of Enoch 18:3) were clearly written after the Son of God had come and had exposed Satan's evil character.

Two documents that may indicate what Jews thought about Satan and evil spirits before Jesus' time are the Dead Sea Scrolls and the writings of Josephus (AD 37–c. 100). But neither of them speaks of Satan as being evil. (See "Jewish Teaching about Satan before Jesus" in the Appendix.)

garden of Eden but who was no longer upright. However, none of God's prophets or wise men made the connection between all those characters.⁵⁵ Only after men received the life of God did they begin to realize that Satan, the apostate cherub, the Serpent, light-bringer, and Leviathan were terms for the same being. It was only after Pentecost that the apostles began to speak with knowledge about the Accuser and to teach, as Jesus had done, about "the Accuser and his angels" (Rev. 12:9), "the angels that sinned" (2Pet. 2:4), and "the angels who did not keep to their own domain" (Jude 1:6). Before then, many people did believe that maleficent spiritual beings existed, but they often devised elaborate myths about them because they did not know the truth of the matter.

To understand the following Old Testament stories rightly, one must keep in mind how complete the spiritual darkness was before the Son of God was revealed. To read these stories from the perspective of people living at that time, we must lay aside the knowledge of God that the Son brought. Otherwise, we will impose upon these ancient characters motives and thoughts that were impossible for them, and more importantly, we will miss the greatest lesson these stories teach – the value of the Son!

TARES IN HEAVEN: *Satan and Job*

Of the forty-two chapters in the book of Job, Satan figures in only the first two. In them, as throughout the Old Testament, Satan is depicted as an obedient agent of God. If we think of Satan as wicked when we read Job's story, we are right; at the same time, if we think that Job or anyone else at that time saw Satan that way, we are mistaken. The Son was still hidden, and hidden with him was the knowledge of God, who alone knows the hearts. If we read Job's story with this in mind, we will see that nothing in Satan's words or deeds would have revealed to anyone at that time that he was evil. Here is the opening scene of Job's story:

Job 1

6. There was a day when the sons of God came in to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them.
7. And the LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" And Satan answered the LORD, "From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it."
8. And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one who fears God and eschews evil?"
9. Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing?"
10. Have you not made a hedge around him, and around his house, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.
11. But stretch out your hand now and strike all that he has, and he will curse you to your face."

⁵⁵ The Greek word for "Devil" appears only in the New Testament because New Testament books were written in Greek. "Devil" is the Greek equivalent of the Old Testament Hebrew word for "Satan", which means "Accuser" or "Slanderer". Also see Footnote 8, page 16.

12. Then the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not put your hand on him.” So, Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.

Let us revise verse 6 to read like this:

6. There was a day when the sons of God came in to present themselves before the LORD, and Gabriel came also among them.

Nothing in that revised verse would suggest to anyone that Gabriel is evil. Just so, nothing in the original verse 6 suggests that Satan is evil. It is only because the Son of God revealed that Satan is evil that we have a sense of his wickedness when we read that verse, or anything else about him in the Old Testament.

By all indications, this gathering of the sons of God was not a special or unusual event. When God asked Satan where he had been, Satan calmly and honestly answered, as if it was a routine question, telling God and the others who were there that he had come “from going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.” Such a conversation is only to be expected. God was known to send heavenly beings to “travel about on the earth” (Zech. 1:10–11), and presumably, He would afterward ask them questions about their earthly visits, just as He asked Satan here. Furthermore, as we will discuss in detail later, Satan had responsibilities on earth that would have demanded his attention, for it was his duty, as “god of this world”, to see and to know what was going on among the nations, and to manage it (2Cor. 4:4). Therefore, in substance, Satan’s reply to God’s question was, “I have been carrying out my duties on earth.”

The next thing that happened in this opening scene of Job is that God drew Satan into a conversation in which He, not Satan, brought up the subject of Job. He asked Satan if he had considered Job, describing him as “a perfect and upright man”. Satan did not ask who God was talking about. He obviously knew who Job was, and he stated his firm conviction that Job would not continue to be perfect and upright if God took Job’s blessings away.

Because we know that Satan is a wicked creature, we tend to read into this heavenly conversation things that are not there. First, it is commonly assumed that Satan disagreed with God’s judgment of Job’s character; he most certainly did not. Everyone in heaven knew that God’s judgments are perfect, and Satan would not have been so foolish as to dispute what God said. If God said that Job was perfect and upright, then Satan would not have dared to think anything else. What Satan meant by his reply to God was only that the perfect and upright Job would turn from his righteousness if God stopped blessing him. And it should be noted that none of God’s other sons spoke up to express a contrary opinion, even though as another heavenly scene shows, they were free to do so (1Kgs. 22:20). Second, not only did Satan not contradict God, but *God did not contradict Satan, either!* Nothing God said or did would have made Satan seem wrong, much less evil, to the heavenly beings at that meeting. Consequently, it must have appeared to them that God was handing Job over to Satan in order to see what Job would do. But that was not the case. God already knew what Job would do. He initiated this conversation with Satan because He had a wonderful blessing in mind for Job, and He had chosen Satan to be His agent in bringing it about.

Because we know Satan is evil, we also tend to overlook the reverential deference that Satan showed to God in this scene. He was not hasty to say anything, but remained silent until he was

spoken to, respectfully waiting for God to choose whether or not to speak to him, and if He spoke, to choose the subject of the conversation. We also tend to assume that Satan wanted to hurt Job, but nothing Satan said or did indicates he considered Job to be important enough to want to hurt him. Besides, it was obvious to everyone that God was pleased with Job, and since Satan desired and expected a promotion from God, he would not have put that promotion in jeopardy by harming someone with whom God was pleased. *It was God's plan, not Satan's, that Job should suffer.* Satan expressed his opinion about Job, but he respectfully waited for God's response, if any, to his opinion. He may even have been surprised that God's response was to send him to earth to afflict Job.

Here is the same opening scene from the book of Job, with some clarifying commentary:

Job 1

8. And the LORD said to Satan, “[*Since you have been on earth, doing your work, tell us,*] have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one who fears God and eschews evil?”
9. Then Satan answered the LORD and said, “[*Yes, O Master, but we all know how men are.*] Does Job fear God for nothing?”
10. Have you not made a hedge around him, and around his house, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.
11. But stretch out your hand now and strike all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.”
12. Then the LORD said to Satan [*Note that God does not rebuke Satan, nor express any disagreement with him.*], “Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not put your hand on him.” So, Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD [*to earth again, to do what God had commanded him to do*].

Satan swiftly accomplished his cruel mission from God regarding poor Job. But what else would any of God's heavenly servants have done? If God had sent Gabriel to afflict Job, would Gabriel have refused to carry out God's command? The fact that Satan carried out the mission God gave him, then, would not have revealed to anyone that God saw Satan as wicked. Satan may have struck some as a fearsome instrument of God, but not an evil one.

Nothing in Job's story suggests that Satan was obsessed with Job, or even that he was much interested in him. God brought up the subject of Job, then sent Satan to earth to afflict him, and Satan did as God commanded. As far as the Bible is concerned, that is the extent of Satan's involvement in Job's story. As I said before, after the first two chapters, Satan is not mentioned again in the book of Job. By all indications, God is the one whose thoughts were on Job, not Satan.

It is significant that neither Job nor his three friends who came to him during his suffering ever blamed Satan for Job's afflictions. Job and his three “miserable comforters” did not agree on much, but they always agreed that it was God's hand that had touched Job and afflicted him (Job 19:21). It was clearly irrelevant to them which agent, if any, God had used in the process;

they blamed Satan no more than they blamed the storm that killed Job's children or the Sabceans and Chaldeans who killed Job's servants and stole his herds. It isn't clear that Job and his friends even knew that Satan existed, but even if they knew of him, they still were wise enough to know that God alone is responsible for whatever happens to His servants, and they would have viewed anyone else's involvement in Job's suffering as mere detail. And they were right.⁵⁶

After God had taken from Job all that he possessed, including his children, there was another gathering of His heavenly sons. Satan, as usual, was among them. Job had, no doubt, earned respect in heaven, and Satan himself must have been impressed. Job had not cursed God, and he still maintained the integrity of his righteousness. Just as before, Satan respectfully waited for God to initiate any conversation, which God did, asking him again where he had been. And again, God, not Satan, brought up the subject of Job:

Job 2

2. And the LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" And Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it."
3. And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one who fears God and eschews evil? And still, he holds fast his integrity, even though you moved me against him to destroy him without cause."
4. And Satan answered the LORD and said, "[*Yes, Job is holding fast his integrity. Still, we all know how men are. They love themselves and will do anything to save their lives.*] Skin for skin, yes, all that a man has, he will give for his life.
5. Stretch out your hand now and strike his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face."
6. And the LORD said to Satan [*As before, God neither rebukes nor expresses disagreement with Satan.*], "Behold, he is in your hand. But save his life."
7. So, Satan went out from the presence of the LORD [*to do as God had commanded him*], and he struck Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the top of his head.⁵⁷

What Satan did to Job was undeniably cruel, but God commanded it to be done. Indeed, He openly commanded it to be done in an Assembly of His sons. Who in heaven, then, would have seen Satan as evil for his cruelty to Job when he was carrying out God's command to be cruel? If the sons of God had judged Satan to be evil for his cruel treatment of righteous Job, then they would have had to judge God Himself to be evil, too, and that was unthinkable.

Job's ordeal continued for months, and heavenly observers were no doubt impressed with how tenaciously Job clung to his righteousness:

⁵⁶ For more on this issue, see my book, *Suffering and the Saints*, available for online reading at GoingtoJesus.com.

⁵⁷ The degree of Job's sufferings is not often pointed out. His boils are well reported, but a close examination of the book of Job will show that Satan afflicted Job for months with many horrific ailments, both physical and mental. In fact, the role that Job's three friends played in his torment leads one to conclude that they were inspired by Satan to come to him, not merely by compassion for Job's suffering.

Job 23

11. My foot has held fast to His steps. I have kept His way. I have not turned aside.
- 12a. Nor have I turned away from the commandment of His lips.

Job 27

- 5b. Until I die, I will not forsake my integrity!
6. I will hold fast to my righteousness, and I will not let it go! My heart will not condemn me so long as I live!

So Job thought. But for Job to let go of his own righteousness so that he might taste of God's righteousness was the entire purpose for his sufferings. The very thing that Job feared most – facing God without righteousness (as Job knew it) – was the very thing God was after, and faithful Job was resisting that blessing with every fiber of his being.

Years ago, I had a dream from the Lord concerning this. In my dream, I was in a trench on the front lines of a fierce, dark battle. Flashes of gunfire were on every side, and shells were bursting overhead. Then I found myself engaged in bitter hand-to-hand combat. The particular enemy soldier with whom I was fighting was strong, and he managed to get me on my back in the muddy trench and had his powerful hands around my throat. Desperately, I struggled to twist away from his death grip, flailing with my fists, kicking, grabbing for his face or hair – doing anything I could to get him off me. In the midst of my struggle, I looked up into his face, and to my utter surprise, I saw that it was Jesus. His face showed no signs of the hatred that I expected to see. His look was solemn and determined but not angry, and suddenly, I understood. I was fighting against the blessing of dying to self and living to God. Realizing that, my struggle then turned into an internal one. It became a struggle *not to struggle* against what the Lord was trying to do for me. Everything in my flesh wanted to fight against Jesus and stay alive, but everything in my spirit wanted Jesus to win. At the end of my dream, I was there in the muddy trench, struggling to make my flesh cooperate with Jesus and let him kill me.

This was Job's struggle, but he did not have the knowledge of the Son of God that we, on this side of Pentecost, have been given. For me, it was a choice between my righteousness and the righteousness of God that Jesus brought to men. For Job, it was a choice between his righteousness and nothing, and Job trembled at the thought of standing before God with nothing.

Opinions

Satan would not have been the only one among the sons of God who expected Job to “curse God to His face”, and they all would have had good reason to feel as Satan did, for by Job's time, they would have witnessed many times the disintegration of human integrity in the heat of far less suffering than what befell Job. Job's unusually steadfast patience and faith might have caused some of the sons of God to wonder if they had been wrong about him, but even at that, Job's determined stance would not have made anyone, including Satan, appear to be wicked. Satan's holding of an opinion was not sin, even if the opinion was wrong. If ignorance were sin, then every creature in heaven and earth would be sinning merely by not being God, for only God knows everything. When Satan and his angels were cast out of heaven after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, even the faithful angels who were allowed to stay there remained ignorant of

some things, as Paul and Peter both plainly taught (Eph. 3:9–10; 1Pet. 1:12). Moreover, if ignorance were sin, then the Son himself would be a sinner because even he does not know all that the Father knows (Mk. 13:32). Satan’s opinion of Job, shared with others in heaven, was completely understandable, and they were not condemned by God at all for holding it. God knew from the beginning what Satan thought Job would do if He took away his blessings, and rather than become indignant at what Satan thought, He used Satan’s mindset to accomplish His inscrutable purpose.

The heavenly scenes from the opening chapters of Job are also remarkable for their relaxed atmosphere. Not only was God pleasant and courteous with Satan, just as Satan was with God, but He even invited Satan to express his thoughts. God’s sons witnessed no conflict between God and Satan, no debate, no contradiction, and no difference in judgment concerning Job’s righteous character. Nothing in those scenes revealed that Satan was not like God. On the contrary, his apparent respect for God and his unquestioning obedience to God’s commands would have commended him to the other sons of God. If you think something in those scenes did reveal that Satan was evil, then you should reread the first two chapters of Job and, this time, try not to carry back into Job’s time the knowledge that the Son brought to mankind much later.

God has no opinions, only knowledge, and Satan knew that. If God had rebuked Satan and told him, “You are wrong, Satan. Job will stand firm, no matter what happens,” Satan would have believed God; that would have been the end of it, and the story of suffering Job would not be in the Bible. *But God never told what He knew!* He had something wonderful in mind for Job, and God used ignorant creatures to accomplish His good purpose. This is how God always did because ignorant creatures are the only kind of creatures that were available for God to use before the Son was revealed. And during the process, God rested on His throne, satisfied to let everyone assume whatever they wanted to assume about what He was doing.

God’s patience is terrifying.

Job’s Judgment Day

The most trying part of Job’s suffering was not the brutal afflictions of his body and mind that God sent upon him but the refusal of God to communicate with him. The God whom Job had grown to love so much and to trust so completely ceased speaking to him, and Job did not know why. His tears and desperate cries for help from God were met with stone-cold silence. If anything could have pushed Job over the edge to follow his wife’s counsel to “curse God, and die” (Job 2:9), the sense of being abandoned by God when Job needed Him most was it. In Jesus’ agony on the cross, he felt forsaken, too, and he cried out, “My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?” (Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34). But Job, like Jesus, was determined to be good, as he understood goodness, even to death, and even if it felt as if God was no longer holding on to him:

Job 23

8. Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him;
9. on the left hand where He is working, but I cannot behold Him; He is hiding Himself on the right hand so that I cannot see Him.

10. Still, He knows how it is with me, and when He has tried me, I will come forth like gold.

Throughout his terrible, months-long ordeal, Job begged for God to come to him, and in the end, He did (Job 38–41). However, one of the mystifying elements of Job’s story, until we understand it, is that when God finally did come to Job, His tone was harsh. Job had been a stellar example of steadfast righteousness in the midst of great suffering, and so, we would have expected God to come to Job with words of comfort, even praise. Why, then, did God add to Job’s awful burden by seemingly attacking him with pitiless verbal abuse? Even in the middle of God’s thunderous, final speech, when Job surrendered all claims of purity, and cried out, “I am vile!” (Job 40:4), God rebuked Job, apparently for contradicting God’s judgment that Job was a “perfect and upright” man (Job 1:1). Who was Job to “contend with God” and say that he was not what God had said he was? Satan never did that. How dare Job do such a thing? When God first showed up and demanded, “Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge?” (Job 38:1–2), He was referring to Job, not Satan. But then, God further complicated the matter by threatening Job’s friends with this assessment of Job’s words: “My wrath is kindled against you, for you have not spoken what is right about me, as my servant Job has” (Job 42:7).⁵⁸

Who could have figured this out? How could God say that Job had “spoken of me what is right” and yet, had spoken “words without knowledge”? And even further complicating the matter is the fact that while God seemed warm and courteous with Satan, He seemed cold and harsh toward Job! Anyone looking on would have been tempted to think that God and Satan were in harmony and that Job was the evil one. God’s stern response to Job’s humble confession threw everyone off track, including poor Job. Job had just spent months defending himself as pure. Then God showed up and seemed to be very displeased with Job for doing that. So, Job humbly confessed what he thought God wanted to hear; namely, that he was vile. But then God rebuked Job for that, too! God made it impossible for Job to know what to do or say, or even think. If both “Yes I am” and “No I’m not” are wrong, what is left?

It was an utterly terrifying, Judgment Day kind of moment for Job, with his soul seemingly hanging in the balance. He had said that if God would come to him, he would fill his mouth with arguments (Job 23:4), but here he was, face to face with the Almighty, and Job was left completely at a loss for words. Through long months of unrelenting agony, Job had begged for God to come to him because he expected God to affirm and comfort him when He came. Instead, God came fiercely, condemning whatever came out of Job’s mouth, demanding impossible answers of Job, and having nothing good to say about him. Job simply collapsed in utter confusion, not even sure of who he was anymore:

Job 42

1. Then Job answered the LORD and said,
2. “I know that you can do anything; not even an intent can be kept from you.

⁵⁸ God spoke these words to Job’s friends before Job’s sufferings were completely ended (Job 42:7–10), but after He had finished His lengthy address to Job. I use them here to help show how utterly hopeless and helpless God made Job feel at this point.

3. Who am I?⁵⁹ Perverting counsel with ignorance, I went on, making declarations, but I have no understanding. It is not in me to comprehend things beyond my power.
4. Hear, I beg you, and I will speak! I am asking you, for you make me know.
5. I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.
6. It makes me despise myself, and I repent in dirt and ashes.”

Forced into a Blessing

God’s terrifying speech spanned four chapters of the book of Job (38–41). In it, every time He demanded of Job, “Were you there when I created—?”, He was revealing more of Himself to Job, for His real point was, “I *was* there.” Every time He demanded, “Do you know—?”, He was proclaiming to Job, “I *do* know.” God had finally come to Job, in person, and when He came, He began to glorify Himself so powerfully that He created within Job’s spirit a sense of (though not the knowledge of) God’s kind of righteousness. The result was that Job began to feel what Isaiah would later proclaim; namely, that all human righteousness is “as filthy garments” in God’s sight, and Job’s newly acquired awareness of a righteousness beyond human understanding was God’s precious gift for Job. With that gift, God was exalting Job’s spirit to the threshold of the sacred place where His Son was hidden, a place that no human had ever dreamed existed and, so, had never even prayed to experience. Job was not made a “new creature in Christ”, for he did not receive the holy kind of life that God was making him feel; nevertheless, he was touched by it, and that touch of New Testament grace made Job permanently different from all others of his time.

But God had to crush Job to make him willing to go there. God pressed Job so far down that Job experienced a new kind of humility, the kind found only in God’s kind of life. In the light of God’s righteousness, everything of earth, its yes and its no, its good and its evil – the best and the worst of earthly things or spirits – are all exposed as unclean before God. When Job felt God’s kind of life, he realized that he knew nothing, that he *was* nothing, and he gave in to a new kind of surrender, the surrender of all self-esteem in the face of an infinitely better kind of life. The touch of God’s life created within Job a realization that nothing he could do or say would justify him, no matter how perfect he was in human righteousness. In other words, there was no earthly righteousness that would enable him to stand before God, and there was no earthly way of obtaining such a righteousness. The new kind of righteousness to which he was now introduced had to be granted, or it could never be possessed.

Job’s newfound awareness that human righteousness is unclean in God’s sight was the thing that encouraged Job most to let it go. If human righteousness is unclean before God, why hold on to it? Why not surrender completely to the mercy of God? And what Job learned by doing so was that God takes pleasure in those that hope in His mercy (cp. Ps. 147:11).

With the Son still hidden, Job could not understand all that he was feeling, but he did feel it. God’s ways were still not man’s ways, and God’s thoughts were still not man’s thoughts, and Job was still only a man. It is doubtful that Job fully understood, as long as he lived, what God had

⁵⁹ Literally, “Who is this man?”

done to him, but Job had been rewarded for his devotion to God with a taste of God's kind of life.

Remembering Satan's prediction, that if God afflicted Job enough, then Job would "curse God to His face", some may think that Satan was proved wrong because Job never did curse God. But to Satan, and to the rest of God's sons, Job's eventual repentance and renunciation of righteousness amounted to the same thing, for they were all as ignorant as all of humanity was of the righteousness of God. To them all, righteousness was righteousness, no matter where it was found. They all knew that God was the most righteous of all, but they all believed that God was righteous with the same kind of righteousness they all understood. Therefore, they all believed that to let go of righteousness was the equivalent of letting go of God, and to let go of God is, in essence, to curse Him.

The reason Job did not curse God in his heart when he forsook his righteousness is that God drove Job so far down in spirit that he could not even think to do such a thing. A man must have a vestige of self-esteem left in him to be able to justify anger at being wronged or to justify his own righteousness. He must think enough of himself to think his curse is worth uttering and his righteousness is worth maintaining. Job did not. He had been driven too close to the supreme humility of Christ to think that he was worthy to judge anything or to say anything, good or bad, about God, about himself, or about anything else.

Job's new sense of utter uncleanness before God was an impossible kind of conviction for his time. It was a New Testament kind of conviction from the Spirit of God for God's kind of righteousness, but the Spirit that brings that conviction to human hearts was not yet available. The Son would have to come and make that kind of life possible for man. So, Job was not only left more confused than humanly possible but also more humble than humanly possible, and so, more like God than humanly possible – and more in love than was humanly possible with the God he still did not truly know. Thousands of years after Job died, God spoke highly of him through the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek. 14:14, 20), but even at that late date, no one understood what God had really done to Job because no one yet had God's kind of life. People of the time may have thought that God esteemed Job so highly because Job did not verbally curse Him in the midst of horrible sufferings, but God had known from the beginning that Job would not do that.

Job stubbornly insisted, until God showed up, that he was pure because he knew that it is as ungodly for the righteous to say they are sinful as it is for the sinful to say they are righteous (cp. Isa. 5:20). Job felt compelled to confess his purity because he knew that he had been perfectly righteous according to the standard of righteousness that he knew. He just did not understand that God wanted to take him to a place beyond perfection, and that in that place, something infinitely better than perfect human righteousness awaited him. God was right when He testified of Job, that no one on earth was like him, but there were few if any like Job in heaven, either. But then, even heavenly purity is unclean compared to the righteousness of God. God is so holy that it is beneath Him even to behold what is in heaven, much less at what is on earth:

Psalm 113

4. The LORD is high above all nations. His glory is above the heavens!
5. Who *is* like the LORD our God, who has made His home on high,
6. who abases *Himself* to look at *what is* in heaven as well as on earth?

The only way that a perfect man like Job could have possibly become more like God was for God to interrupt the normal process of human life and make Job more than perfect. God did that. He came to Job, and to a few other souls before the Son was revealed, and He carried them all to the door of that most sacred place. However, not one of them willingly took the journey. They were all afraid to go because they sensed that it was a place where righteousness could no longer save them from damnation. Nevertheless, God took them there because He knew what they were yearning for, even if they did not, and every person He took there was forever changed by the experience. Each of them became a mystery figure, somewhat like the hidden Son, but in their cases, they were a mystery even to themselves.

When God unlawfully forgave King David of adultery and murder, that taste of New Testament mercy made David an alien to this world. When Moses saw God's glory on Mount Sinai, no one could ever look at Moses' shining face again. Solomon was driven to the brink of insanity after God imparted to him a little of His kind of wisdom. After years of observing earthly life through the prism of such wisdom, Solomon cried out in utter frustration, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!" (Eccl. 1:2), and he insisted that the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth into the kind of life that humans have (Eccl. 7:1b; 2:17). What other conclusion could Solomon have reached, once he had pondered this world with the wisdom hidden in God's kind of life? Moses, David, and Solomon survived their experiences, but they were transformed by them into something beyond the ordinary state of man. So it was for Job. He really had been "perfect and upright", but God's kind of life transported him beyond such uncleanness.

When Jesus became a curse for us (Gal. 3:13), he understood what he was doing, but Job had to become willing to be cursed, if that was what God wanted, without knowing what was happening to him. At length, Job became willing to be wrong, though everything he had ever known was telling him he was right. And when he did so, what he found, to his very great surprise, was not damnation but a new kind of peace, and a closeness to God that surpassed all human understanding.

So, in spite of how it appeared, God *did* come to Job with comfort and peace, and even praise, but that kind of comfort and peace, and that kind of praise, is so foreign to this creation that creatures within it perceive it as an attack. God was loving Job by driving him toward a rich blessing, though it seemed to everyone, everywhere, that God was berating the poor man. In his ignorance of God, Job feared to follow God, for to follow God in this case meant to renounce the only kind of righteousness that existed, as far as Job knew. It was impossible for Job even to want go to the place to which God was inviting him because Job did not know that such a place existed.

This is the truth behind Jesus' words to his disciples, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (Jn. 6:44), and, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (Jn. 15:16). *None of us who have God's kind of life have it because we, within ourselves, wanted it.* We sought God only because He put it into our hearts to seek Him, many times by sending affliction or trouble into our lives, waking us up to our need of His righteousness (cp. 1Cor. 15:34). God had to create in us a hunger for His kind of life, and when He did that, we fell on our knees and sought Him for the sweet relief from ourselves that His Spirit brings – the relief

that most people on earth fear, choosing to cling to their own kind of life and righteousness instead.

How far from God's thoughts we all are! None of us, in ourselves, can desire God *as He really is* because what He really is, is contrary to our human desires. God has to make us willing to come to the real Him, and sometimes, it takes quite a while for us to be made willing. But God is patient because He loves us and is determined to bless us. His terrifying patience is, in fact, our salvation (2Pet. 3:15). It took months of horrific pain and sorrow for Job to become willing to let God take him beyond perfection. God patiently watched and waited, and when Job at last was willing, but could go no further by himself, when bleeding Job had to be picked up and carried to the threshold of the "secret place of the Most High", God came to him, and picked him up, and took him there.

Poor Job?

A couple of times in this chapter, I have used the phrase, "poor Job", but that is an assessment of Job from the standpoint of this world. From a human perspective, Job was pathetic, and even the basest of men despised him:

Job 30

1. Those younger than I mock me, whose fathers I would have refused to put among the dogs of my flock.
- ...
8. *They are* fools, worthless people, *the kind* driven out of the land with whips.
9. But now, I have become their song. I am a byword to them.
10. They loathe me; they keep far from me, and do not hesitate to spit in my face.
11. Because He has let loose His bowstring and brought me low, they throw off the bridle at the sight of me.

From Job's wise friends to the basest of men in Job's community, everyone was absolutely certain that Job deserved to be condemned. That is what ordinary humans, even at their best state, have always thought of those whom God takes to the holy, hidden place occupied by His Son. Throughout history, men have treated God's faithful servants as "the offscouring of all things" (1Cor. 4:13). In every culture, they have suffered "trial of mockings and scourgings, and also of chains and imprisonment" (Heb. 11:36). But that is not all.

Hebrews 11

37. They were stoned; they were sawn in half; they were tempted; they were put to death with the sword; they wandered around in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, maltreated
38. (of whom the world was not worthy), wandering about in desolate places, and mountains, and caves, and holes in the ground.

But in truth, were not all these suffering souls being blessed?⁶⁰ Yes, they were, for God has determined that the pathway into His kingdom is a pathway fraught with persecution and suffering (Acts 14:22). Was it not part of God's good plan for Joseph to have his wicked brothers to sell him into Egyptian slavery, since God was positioning him to become ruler of the nation? And was it not part of God's blessing of Paul to have him sent to Rome in chains so that he could testify to Caesar about Jesus? And if the man that God chastens is blessed, as David said (Ps. 94:12–13), was not David being blessed by God when Shimei stood on the hill cursing him and pelting him with stones? David saw God's hand in what Shimei was doing and told his companions that God had sent Shimei to do it (2Sam. 16:5–10). Peter and John certainly considered themselves blessed when they were condemned and beaten by Israel's rulers (Acts 5:41), and the author of Hebrews commended certain saints because they had “joyfully accepted the seizing of your possessions, knowing in yourselves that you have a greater and lasting possession in heaven” (Heb. 10:34). And Moses chose to suffer with God's destitute people rather than to continue enjoying the pleasures of palace life in Egypt (Heb. 11:25). All those men of faith understood that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *of comparison* with the glory that shall be revealed” (Rom. 8:18). If the men who despised Job had known God, they would have preferred Job's lot to their own, for with each new sorrow, Job was being forced closer to God's kind of life.

Jesus equated eternal life with the knowledge of God (Jn. 17:3), and no price can be too high for us to pay to obtain that knowledge. God certainly thought that no price was too high for Him to pay for us to have it, for it was to that end that He gave up His beloved Son. After Jesus brought the young Paul down from his exalted Pharisaic perch into the valley of humility, Paul valued more than he valued his own life the knowledge of God which the Son had compelled him to receive. At the end of his suffering, Job would have agreed with Paul, that the glory into which God pressed him was worth all he had suffered, and worth anything else he could have suffered besides. God had loved Job as much as He could without revealing His Son. For more love than that, Job (and the whole world) would have to wait until the Son's unveiling.

Man in His Best State

The wisdom of men is foolishness to God, and the wisdom of God is foolishness to men (1Cor. 2:14). That is why people sometimes feel attacked and become angry when they come face to face with God's kind of wisdom. God's life exposes even the greatest among us to be nothing in comparison. It exposes our desperate need of something beyond ourselves. It reveals to us what Job's heart learned; to wit, “every man, in his best state, is altogether vanity” and “every man walks about in a vain show” (Ps. 39:5b–6a). Those who still feel that their own kind of life holds some eternal value (that is, those who are proud) do not like to hear that truth.

Nothing but God's righteousness can reveal the worthlessness of man “in his best state”; that is, in his most perfect state of human righteousness, like Job. Neither Job nor his three friends were fools. Job would not have had fools for friends. Satan may have moved Job's righteous

⁶⁰ There are many who have seen this unsavory truth, embraced it, and then given it better expression than I am able. For instance, in his “Meditation 17”, the British poet John Donne (1572–1631) wrote, “Affliction is a treasure, and scarce any man hath enough of it. No man hath affliction enough, that is not matured and ripened by it, and made fit for God by that affliction.”

friends to come to him with their accusations, but they, like Job, were shining examples of man in his best state, and their unjust condemnation of Job was the best judgment that man in his best state had to offer. Also, as we have seen, Job agreed with his friends that his suffering was the work of God, but Job was the only one wise enough or humble enough to admit that he did not know why God was doing it. They assumed, based on their own knowledge and experience, that God was afflicting Job because Job had sinned, and they challenged Job to find one righteous person in all of history whom God had afflicted as He was afflicting him (Job 5:1, 27). But Job, *with the same kind of knowledge his three friends possessed*, argued just as fiercely that he was pure – until God appeared with *His* kind of righteousness, making Job’s argument seem as foolish as theirs.

At the end of Job’s suffering, and until the end of his earthly life, Job could have been impressed no more with even the highest degree of human righteousness, only God’s – even if he did not understand that righteousness. As much as God loved Job, He was determined that His Son would have the honor of revealing His righteousness, and until that time came, God would not allow such understanding into the heart of man (1Cor. 2:9).

When Jesus said, “I am meek and lowly” (Mt. 11:29), no one understood his kind of meekness. Nevertheless, Jesus continued to demonstrate it and tell about it (e.g., Lk. 14:7–10). Once, when his disciples were quarreling over which of them would be the greatest, Jesus took a little child, stood him before them, and warned them that if they did not become like that child, they would never even enter his Father’s kingdom, much less be the greatest in it (Mt. 18:1–3). They did not receive the admonition, and at the Last Supper, they were still quarreling over who would be greatest (Lk. 22:24). Jesus patiently explained to them again that God’s kind of greatness is different from man’s, saying, “He who is greatest among you must be as the youngest, and the ruler, like one who serves. . . . I am in your midst as one who serves” (Lk. 22:26–27). Then Jesus wrapped a towel about him and bowed down, like a slave, to wash the disciples’ feet (Jn. 13:2–5). None of them believed, or could have believed, that in doing this, Jesus was showing them the heart of God.

Man’s view of God is in a direction different from the direction to which Jesus pointed them. That is why men always look the wrong way when they search for greatness. God had to beat Job down in order to get him to look the right way and to go in the right direction. My father said in a sermon many years ago, “The way up is down, and the way down is up.” With that, he was echoing the hidden wisdom of the Son of God, who said, “Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and the one who humbles himself shall be exalted” (Lk. 14:11). This is why man “in his best state” is in such bad spiritual condition. What God sees as up, he sees as down, and so he avoids it, and what God sees as down, he sees as up, and so he pursues it.

Did God Really Prove Satan Right?

God knew how it would look to others when He harshly spoke to Job. He also knew that Job’s forced confession of vileness would make it seem to some in heaven that they had been right to think Job would forsake his uprightness if enough pressure was applied to him. And in a way, they were right – but for the wrong reason. They thought Job was forsaking righteousness altogether when he came to despise his own righteousness, for they were ignorant of God’s righteousness. They did not know that God’s condemnation of Job’s righteousness came from a

spiritual place that was beyond perfection, the place where God and His Son lived together . . . and alone. By that condemnation, God was opening the door to “beyond perfection” and inviting Job in for a visit, to breathe in the aroma of His secret place and to feel its power and glory.

We are not told what took place at the next gathering of the sons of God, but Satan must have walked into the meeting with great satisfaction. It did not matter to Satan that after Job’s suffering, Job continued to live a sinless life. In his view, God’s thunderous rebuke of Job and Job’s repentance and confession of wretchedness had proved him right. Satan knew that *he* had failed to compel Job to surrender his hold on righteousness, and he knew now that it had taken God’s power to do it. All the same, Satan would not have been embarrassed by his failure; everyone in heaven knew that God was greater than all. Instead of hanging his head in shame, Satan would have basked in the glory (as he saw it) of having been proved right, even though it took God to do it. He would have felt gratitude for that, and would have praised God more than ever in the heavenly Assembly.

It is my guess that Satan concluded, when all was said and done, that God had known from the beginning that nothing Satan could do would make Job forsake righteousness, and that God had sent him to afflict Job knowing that he would fail, and that He Himself would have to be the one to do it, thus demonstrating to all of heaven that He was still the greatest of all. Satan was sure that God was just like him, proud and willing to trample others to show Himself superior to them.

God was patient.

God’s eventual restoration of Job’s health and possessions would have been seen by Satan as no more than a consolation prize for the loser, given to Job only after he broke down and admitted his worthlessness. And if the Son had not come and given us an understanding, Job’s repentance and restoration could only have appeared the same way to us. Without the Son, we might even have thought that God sent Satan to afflict Job because He agreed with Satan about Job. We might have concluded, as Satan no doubt did, that God’s plan all along had been to glorify Himself by making the best man on earth confess his worthlessness – but only after the wise and powerful Satan had tried and failed. Finally, we might also have thought, as everyone watching at the time must have thought, that God sent Satan to *test* Job. Even Job thought he was being tested (Job 23:10), as did the wise young man, Elihu (Job 34:36). But Job’s ordeal was not a test. It was a reward.

What was really going on with Job was that he was driven to repent simply for being human, although before the Son came, there was no cure for that disease. God’s powerful presence made Job feel the vanity of his human kind of life, but righteous men such as Job would have to wait until the coming of the Spirit, purchased by the sacrifice of the Son, to receive God’s eternal kind of life and be forever delivered from the bondage of perfection in their own kind of righteousness.

Thoughtless

Brother Gary Savelli once remarked that one of the beautiful things about the truth is that it liberates us from taking sides in the controversies of this world. The truth is neither the way that good men of the world see it nor the way that evil men see it; the truth is “a new and living way” that no one of this world knows about. We all know that God is neither male nor female, neither

young nor old, and so forth. But listen! God is also neither wise nor foolish *in the way that men know wisdom and foolishness*. Nor is He right or wrong, or good or evil *in the way that men know right and wrong, or good and evil*. God is completely other than everything we know in our own kind of life! When God said, “My ways are not your ways” (Isa. 55:8), He meant *any* of man’s ways, whether they be ways that men think are right or ways that men consider to be wrong.

The spirit of the place where God took Job left Job more than speechless; it left him thoughtless. What can one think when confronted with a completely unknown kind of life? In the presence of that life, Job was forced to be still and to experience spiritual rest from, that is, the complete absence of human ways. In the blinding beauty of God’s kind of life, Job could sense the utter worthlessness of his own. In the end, Job abhorred himself because he, like Solomon, felt the absolute vanity of man’s kind of life. Job and Solomon’s hatred of this earthly life (Eccl. 2:17) was exactly what Jesus later said every person must feel before they can become his disciple:

Luke 14

26. If any man comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, and his wife and children, and his brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

This kind of hatred is possible only for those in whose hearts God creates a desire for His kind of life. This is the spiritual reality behind Jesus’ statement, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (Jn. 6:44).

Satan may have rejoiced that God, as he saw it, brought Job down to the dust where he belonged, but in bringing Job down to the dust, God had raised Job up so high that Satan couldn’t see him. Job could not express what he was feeling, but he was repenting for not having the true knowledge of God, for being merely “perfect and upright”, and for not seeing beyond his perfect righteousness. Job’s mind was useless in helping him understand what he was repenting for, but his broken heart knew that he must, and so, he cried out for God’s mercy. Job never confessed to committing any specific sins because he had not committed any. He repented and abhorred himself only because he had been ushered into a place of such holiness that it revealed all known righteousness to be unclean in God’s sight.

Leviathan

In the last part of God’s fierce address to Job, He spoke of a creature He called “Leviathan”. No one knew that God was referring to Satan. Not even Satan himself would have guessed it as he smugly watched God pummel Job with unanswerable questions about that mysterious creature:

Job 41

1. Can you draw out Leviathan with a hook, or his tongue with a cord which you let down? [*a reference to the way God had drawn Satan into a conversation about Job*]

2. Can you put a hook into his nose, or bore his jaw through with a thorn? [*as God had hooked Satan and manipulated him to accomplish His will for Job – cp. 2Kgs. 19:28*]
3. Will he make many supplications to you? Will he speak soft words to you? [*as Satan always spoke to God*]
4. Will he make a covenant with you? Will you take him for a servant forever?
5. Will you play with him as with a bird? [*as God was toying with Satan that very moment*]

It is easy to imagine Satan listening in the background, pleased to see God beating Job down with these questions, totally blind to the meaning of God's words. He did not understand what God was doing within Job because it was entirely a matter of the heart, and God alone knows the heart (Acts 15:8; Heb. 4:12).

“Wash Me, Not the Animals!”

Long after Job, King David, broken in spirit, pleaded for the same relief from human nature for which Job had pleaded:

Psalm 51

2. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!
3. For I admit to my transgressions, and my sin is continually before me.
...
7. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
...
10. Create within me a clean heart, O God, and re-create in me a steadfast spirit!

David's cry for God to wash *him* was a cry, not for another ceremony but for a washing of his soul. Under the law, priests could wash themselves (Ex. 30:18–21) and wash the sacrificial meat (Lev. 1:9, 13, et al.), but nothing was ever mentioned about anyone washing another person. God ordained no one but Moses to wash another person, and Moses did it only once, when he consecrated Aaron and his sons to begin their Levitical priesthood (Lev. 8:1–6). Later, when Moses prophesied to Israel of the coming Messiah, he told them to look for a prophet like him (Dt. 18:15); that is, a mighty prophet who would wash people, not things.

That washing of others – this time, a washing of their souls – was exactly what David and Job's souls were crying out for and what John the Baptist announced that the Messiah would do (Mt. 3:11). In other words, the washing of the spirits of men, the answer to the prayers of both Job and David, would be the Messiah's credentials, so to speak, the proof that he had come. On the day of Pentecost, when the resurrected Jesus washed the souls of his disciples from sin by the holy Spirit, conclusive proof was given to Israel that Jesus was the Messiah, and that washing continued to take place afterward:

Titus 3

5. Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but in His mercy, He delivered us through the washing of the holy Spirit that brings about a new birth and restoration,
6. which *Spirit* He has poured out upon us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Revelation 1

- 5b. To him who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in his blood,
- 6a. and has made of us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father.

To be sure, others besides Job and David longed for the grace that God would give only after His Son came and paid the price for it. Nevertheless, “these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them far off, they welcomed them and confessed that they were foreigners and pilgrims on the earth. . . . And these all, though receiving a good testimony by their faith, did not receive the promise” (Heb. 11:13, 39). “The promise” was the relief that Job and David were praying for. It was the relief that God’s kind of life would bring to fallen man. But until the Son came, no one who longed for it either understood their longing or knew such a relief existed.

TARES IN HEAVEN: *Satan and David*

Man does not need Satan’s influence either to be or to do evil. If God were to destroy Satan today, humans would still be sinful and do sinful deeds. Many assume that this truth is contradicted by the scriptures which tell us that Satan⁶¹ once rose up against Israel and provoked David to number them and that God was displeased that David did so (1Chron. 21:1, 7). Many also assume that Satan is revealed to be wicked in those verses, before the Son came. Neither of those assumptions holds up to scrutiny.

David’s numbering of Israel was, indeed, a transgression,⁶² and it did provoke God to great wrath. However, 1Chronicles 21:1 does not tell the whole story, for the same event is related in another book of the Bible, and there we are told:

2Samuel 24

1. The anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and He provoked David against them, to say, “Go! Number Israel and Judah.”

We do not know what Israel did to anger God, but the above verses clearly show that Satan was working *with* God, not against Him, just as in the story of Job. Those two stories even use the same Hebrew verb to describe what God and Satan did; namely, that they both “provoked” David to sin. Therefore, what God did to David in 2Samuel 24 is exactly what Satan did to David in 1Chronicles 21. No one in heaven or earth would have concluded that what Satan did

⁶¹ This, in the thirteenth book of the Bible, is the first time Satan is mentioned by name. Satan thought he was of supreme importance in the story of God’s work with man, but he was just a bit player, used occasionally by God to accomplish His wise purposes. The relatively few references to Satan in the Bible reflect that truth.

⁶² The law required an offering from each person numbered (Ex. 30:11–16). Was David numbering Israel for the money? Whatever his motive, the repentant David knew that what he had done was a “great sin” (2Sam. 24:10).

in 1Chronicles revealed him to be evil, when in 2Samuel, God did it, too. If both did the same deed at the same time to the same person, who at the time would have seen those scriptures as revealing that Satan was evil but God was not?

So, David did only what David wanted to do; God just used Satan to open the door for him to do it, the same way God was always encouraging Satan and the rest of heaven's creatures to do what they really wanted to do. What David did was David's sin. It was not Satan's – or God's.

In this story, as in Job, Satan acted as God's agent, entrusted with some of God's most important missions, those which dealt with God's most valued earthly servants, such as Job and David, and Israel's high priest, as the following story shows.

TARES IN HEAVEN: *Satan and the High Priest*

The young prophet Zechariah was given a vision of an important trial as it took place in heaven. On trial was Joshua, Israel's high priest, who had in some unstated way transgressed the law. Although his life, maybe even his soul, hung in the balance, the high priest himself, down on earth, may not even have known that this heavenly trial was taking place.

Zechariah 3

1. Then *the angel* showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.
2. And the LORD [speaking through His angel] said to Satan, "The LORD rebukes you, O Satan! Even the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebukes you! Is not this man a brand [a scorched stick of wood] plucked out of the fire?"
3. Now, Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and he stood before the angel.
4. And *the angel of the LORD* answered and spoke to those who stood before him, saying, "Take the filthy garments away from him!" And to *Joshua* he said, "Behold, I have made your iniquity to pass from you, and I am clothing you with stately robes."

A careful analysis of these verses reveals much about Satan's status in heaven before the Son was revealed.

Verse 1: Satan's Office

Here, Satan is functioning as Prosecutor, or Accuser, in God's court for crimes committed on earth. After all, the Son revealed to Paul that Satan is "god of this world", and in Zechariah's vision, Satan is performing his appointed task in the expected manner, standing at the right hand of the accused, against whom he was bringing charges.

Speaking of when the Son of God ascended into heaven and Satan was exposed and cast out, John said he heard a loud voice in heaven cry out, "The Accuser of our brethren is cast *down!*" (Rev. 12:10). The title, Accuser, may strike some readers as a title applicable only to someone wicked, but that opinion has no biblical basis. Jesus told the Jews that in the Final Judgment, Moses would be their Accuser (Jn. 5:45), and when he said that, no one took him to mean that Moses was wicked. On the contrary, everyone understood Jesus to be emphasizing Moses' great authority. Just so, serving as heaven's Accuser only showed Satan's great authority. Of course, an Accuser *can* be evil, but

Moses being Israel's Accuser proves that the title, in itself, does not reveal anything about the Accuser's character.

Verse 2: The Verdict

The presiding angel's rebuke of Satan was stern, but it did not reveal to anyone that Satan was wicked. Hundreds of years before this, Michael used the same phrase to rebuke Satan (Jude 1:9), yet, in this vision, Satan still occupied his very high position in God's court. Besides, with which of God's servants has God not been stern, even severe, including Job, whom God loved? Jesus had no qualms about calling his disciples "fools" (Lk. 24:25), and his frustration with their unbelief once grew to the point that he cried out against them, "O faithless and perverse generation! How long shall I be with you and put up with you!" (Lk. 9:41). Jesus reprovved Peter with withering harshness (Mt. 16:23) and hotly rebuked James and John (Lk. 9:52–56) – and they were the three disciples closest to him! Eliphaz, one of Job's friends, observed that in God's sight, even angels are foolish (Job 4:18) – and Eliphaz knew nothing about fallen angels; he was talking about all of them!

So, the presiding angel's harsh rebuke of Satan in Zechariah's vision could not have revealed to anyone that God saw Satan as wicked. That knowledge was still hidden in the Son. To the heavenly court, the angel's rebuke would only have meant that God had ruled against Satan in his case against Joshua. Moreover, it was well known, even before Zechariah's time, that God corrects whom He loves (Prov. 3:12) and that "open rebuke is better than secret love" (Prov. 27:5). Therefore, an open, harsh rebuke from God could have been taken as evidence that God loved Satan.

Verses 3–4: Merciful Judgment

Nowhere in the Old Testament is Satan found making a false accusation against any man.⁶³ That would have been an evil too obvious for anyone to miss. Satan himself would have condemned anyone in Israel making a false accusation, for the law of Moses strictly forbade it (Ex. 20:16). Satan may have misjudged the strength of Job's character, but misjudging someone is different from bringing phony charges against him in court. That, Satan did not do. In Zechariah's vision, then, Satan was not acting like a transgressor; he was prosecuting one. And, being "full of wisdom" (Ezek. 28:12), he would not have come into God's court with anything but an airtight case. He was much too shrewd to risk his reputation by showing up in court without provable, damning facts. According to the law, then, Satan should not have lost the case, which means that the presiding angel's rebuke of Satan was not supported by the law of Moses. At the same time, Satan and everyone else present knew that the presiding angel's judgment came from God and that God's judgment was final.

Satan did not bring charges against Joshua for doing good deeds on earth. Not in *God's* court. That would have made no sense at all. Nor did he accuse Joshua for transgressing the laws of heathen countries. God did not require Joshua to live by foreign laws; as an Israelite, Joshua could only be judged by the law God gave to Israel. So, the charges that

⁶³ What Satan suggested to Eve about God was false, but it is debatable as to whether it was intentionally false. See Footnote 65, page 216.

Satan brought against Joshua would have been for transgressions of Moses' law. The fact that Joshua was guilty is indicated by the "filthy garments" Joshua was wearing. In Scripture, dirty clothing symbolizes sin (Rev. 3:4; Jas. 5:2), just as clean clothing symbolizes righteousness (Rev. 19:8), and when the presiding angel commanded the other angels to take away Joshua's filthy garments, he announced that by doing so, he had taken away Joshua's iniquity.

It was fortunate for Joshua the high priest (not to mention for the rest of us) that God is above law, including the law He gave to Israel, and that God will forgive even when the law condemns. God loves mercy, and He was grieved when some of the Israelites chose to die in sin rather than to repent and live:

Ezekiel 33

11. As I live, says the Master, the LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! For why will you die, O house of Israel?

In judging Joshua, God took into account the fact that Joshua and his fellow Jews had recently returned from a seventy-year captivity in Babylon. He saw that they were few in number, poor, and struggling against powerful heathen opposition, and He knew their hearts, that they were willing to observe every ordinance of the law, just as it was written, but time was needed for them to prepare. When Zechariah saw this vision, the Jews did not yet even have a temple where they could perform the required rites. The presiding angel's comment to Satan, "Is not this man a brand plucked out of the fire?" reflects the fact that God understood how difficult Joshua's task was. God could have agreed with Satan and condemned Joshua on some technical points of the law, but He is not quick to do that. God is patient.

Unlawful Mercy

A similar instance of God's preference for mercy over judgment took place in the reign of King Hezekiah, when the young king invited the Israelites who lived in northern Canaan to come celebrate the Passover at Jerusalem. While many of them scoffed at Hezekiah's messengers (2Chron. 30:6–10), a few humbled themselves and took advantage of the king's invitation (2Chron. 30:11), but having lived without God's law for centuries by that time, the few northern Israelites who came were ignorant of the law and showed up ritually unprepared. Satan would have prosecuted them in heaven's court, but down on earth, good King Hezekiah was pleading with God to show them mercy (2Chron. 30:18–19). In response, God not only forgave their failure to keep His law precisely but even blessed them with healing because they had humbled themselves to come to Jerusalem to try to honor Him (2Chron. 30:20–21).

Satan would have judged them by appearances; that is, by how precisely they observed the rules governing the Passover feast. But God judged their hearts, knowing that the poor Israelites who responded to King Hezekiah's call and made the journey to Jerusalem were trying, though ignorantly, to do the right thing. Their ceremonial conduct was undeniably improper, and Satan's case against them, if there was one, was as airtight as was his case against Joshua, the high priest. Nobody could have successfully argued against the case that Satan could have brought into God's court, and as far as we know, he might have done so. But God is merciful and "waits

patiently for us, not willing for anyone to perish, but that all come to repentance” (2Pet. 3:9b). God’s first choice, always, is to forgive.

There were other such examples of divine forbearance of deeds that would have normally been strictly forbidden. In one case, after God healed the Syrian general Naaman, God gave Naaman permission to bow in the temple of Rimmon, an Assyrian god, when he returned to his duties in Syria (2Kgs. 5:1–19). And another time, when David was fleeing for his life from an increasingly mad King Saul, God helped the hungry fugitive by giving him holy bread (1Sam. 21:1–6), which none but God’s priests were allowed to eat (Lev. 24:5–9). God knew the hearts of those two righteous men, and He graciously suspended the rules for them when they were in situations beyond their control.

Satan, a merciless law-and-order prosecutor, could not take into account God’s compassion for Joshua the high priest, and others like him who were willing to do what was right but were in situations that kept them from doing so. Unlike God, he took pleasure in the death of the wicked, as did men who were like him (e.g., Jn. 8:1–11). In Satan’s mind, he would be “like the Most High” if his throne were to be exalted next to God’s throne on the mountain where the congregation of heaven met (Isa. 14:14). He did not understand that being like God is a matter of the heart, not a matter of geography, and he was blind to the fact that there was no similarity between his heart and God’s. That fact was revealed only when the meek and merciful Son of God came and showed us what being “like the Most High” really means.

One can only imagine how much Satan wanted to prosecute David when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her righteous husband, Uriah, a foreigner who had become one of God’s most devoted and capable soldiers (2Sam. 11; 1Chron. 11:10–11, 41). If Satan ever had an open-and-shut case against anyone, this was it. David committed adultery with and impregnated Bathsheba, and then, to cover up the crime, David murdered Uriah. God’s law strictly forbade mercy to be shown to either a murderer or an adulterer (Ex. 21:14; Lev. 20:10), and everyone who knew Moses’ law knew that, including Satan.

After David committed those two great sins, God sent the prophet Nathan to David’s court to publicly confront the king. The humiliated, distraught king knew there was no sacrifice he could make to atone for the sins he had committed. To add to David’s consternation, he remembered what God had done to Israel’s previous king when he had sinned. Now, David found himself in an even worse position, according to the law, and he cried out in hopelessness, “I have sinned against the LORD!” But then Nathan pronounced on the king an impossible judgment: “The LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die” (2Sam. 12:13). It was unlawful mercy, and many in Israel did not believe it. How could David be allowed to escape execution, as God’s law demanded?

Nathan’s declaration of God’s unlawful mercy on David for adultery and murder ranks with Job’s experience as one of the greatest demonstrations of grace shown to man before the Son was revealed. Such grace was blatantly unlawful, and when it was shown, it must have surprised and confused the inhabitants of heaven as much as it did the Israelites on earth. So many in Israel doubted that Nathan had been sent by God that most of the nation revolted against David (2Sam. 20:1–2), and the rebellion was led by one of David’s own sons (2Sam. 15:1–12). David and his kingdom survived the challenge, but he was forever changed by the touch of New Testament grace that he received.

One of the reasons David received the incredible mercy he received from God is that he was so willing to show mercy to others. When God first chose young David to replace King Saul, He told Samuel that He had sought out a man with a heart like His (1Sam. 13:14). David's willingness to forgive the way God forgives was demonstrated on several occasions when, according to the law, David had justifiable reasons to kill, but chose to show mercy instead. He spared Shimei, he spared mad King Saul twice, Joab three times, Amnon and Absalom, his ungodly sons, and probably many others.

Sons of the Accuser

It is dangerous to presume to act on God's behalf without having a heart like God's. Jesus warned his disciples that they would suffer at the hands of such men, religious leaders who would claim to be acting on God's behalf but were not like God in their hearts:

John 16

2. They will put you out of the synagogues. In fact, the hour is coming when everyone who kills you will think he is doing God service.
3. And they will do these things because they have not known either the Father or me.

Such men are the Satans of this world, so to speak, religious leaders completely devoted to God *as they think God is*. During the two millennia of this New Testament era, men of this sort have plundered, brutalized, and executed many an innocent saint, "thinking to do God service." John said that the plaintiff cry of murdered saints rises continually in heaven, saying, "How long, O Master, holy and true, will you not judge and avenge our blood upon those who dwell on earth?" (Rev. 6:10), but for now, John said, they are being told to "quietly wait for a while" (Rev. 6:11). In other words, they are being told to be patient, like God.

The tares still worship with God's wheat, but now they worship together only on earth; heaven has been purged. And when such tares are in earthly positions of authority over God's children, they often reflect the spirit of Satan, heaven's stern Accuser:

John 8

2. Early in the morning, *Jesus* returned to the temple, and all the people came; and when he had sat down, he taught them.
3. Then the scribes and Pharisees led to him a woman caught in adultery, and when they had stood her in the midst,
4. they said to him (testing him), "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of adultery!
5. In the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now then, what do you say?"

These religious leaders were acting exactly as Satan did in Zechariah's vision. They made their living by enforcing the righteousness of Moses' law, and when they caught a woman "in the very act of adultery", they hoped to kill, literally, "two birds with one stone" – the unfortunate woman and Jesus. They stood, as it were, at the woman's right hand, accusing her. She was undeniably guilty of transgressing God's law, and their case against the poor woman was as

airtight as were Satan's cases against Joshua and David. It is little wonder that Jesus called such men, sons of the Accuser (Jn. 8:44).

At the end of the story of the woman caught in adultery, Jesus' pure love for his Father's law put the woman's accusers to shame, and they turned and went away, leaving her alone with the Lord (Jn. 8:9). But that does not mean that the people looking on learned from this episode that those scribes and Pharisees were ungodly, much less that they were sons of the Accuser. In fact, they obviously did not learn that lesson. Otherwise, those men would not have continued to enjoy a wide following in Israel. Those sons of the Accuser retained their high standing despite their hearts being like Satan's because no one yet had God's kind of life to enable them to discern that Satan and his sons were evil. Israel's religious leaders were doing on earth precisely what Satan did in heaven, and, like Satan, they appeared to be working *with* God, not against Him, for in their enforcement of righteousness, they used the same thing that Satan used, the holy law of Moses. However, along with the law's rites, those leaders were using rules which were called "the tradition of the elders", traditions which they had added to the law and believed were as authoritative as the law itself.

Even among his own followers, Jesus had to deal with sons of the Accuser. Some of them were Pharisees who followed Jesus, and they once condemned other disciples when they saw them plucking and eating grain as they all passed through a grainfield on a Sabbath. The law of Moses allowed it (Dt. 23:24), but the tradition of the elders did not. This is how Jesus responded to their accusations:

Matthew 12

3. He said to them, "Haven't you read what David did when he was hungry, he and those with him,
4. how he went into the house of God and ate the bread that was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him, but for the priests alone?
...
7. If you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice', you would not have condemned the innocent."

Jesus' point was that the law God gave to Moses was made for man, not man for the law. But in the view of Satan and his sons, man was made for the law, to observe it precisely, and they despised anyone who did not. Pride in one's own righteousness blinds one to the love of God, and those who are righteous and proud of it feel contempt for those whom they deem less righteous than themselves. God referred to such a smug attitude as being "at ease":

Job 12

5. The one who is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease.

God hates such an attitude, and He sent prophets to warn His people against it:

Amos 6

1. Woe to those who are at ease in Zion!

The self-righteous are skillful at maintaining an appearance of righteousness. Satan did it first, he did it in heaven, and he did it confidently for a very long time in the presence of a very patient God. In God's time, however, the Son was revealed, and the truth about good and evil came to light. God's faithful servants in heaven were relieved of the burden of Satan's presence when the resurrected Son returned to heaven and cleansed it, and God's faithful servants on earth will likewise be relieved of the burden of Satan's presence when the Son returns to earth to reign a thousand years.

TARES IN HEAVEN: *Satan and the Hidden Son*

Psalm 109 contains the Son's prophetic prayer for vengeance against Judas. Verse 6 of that psalm is remarkable because it reveals something about what the hidden Son thought of Satan while they were both residents of heaven. When this psalm was first sung, the Son was still hidden, and so, everyone must have assumed that the bitter cry for a prosecutor from God was simply the cry of an unnamed righteous man. No one suspected it was the voice of the Son of God crying out, "Set a wicked man over him, and let Satan stand at his right hand!" (Ps. 109:6).

We know this is the Son speaking through David to the Father concerning Judas because Peter said as much when he quoted from this psalm in Acts 1:20, telling the congregation, "This scripture must be fulfilled, which the holy Spirit foretold through the mouth of David concerning Judas" (Acts 1:16). Zechariah was given the vision of Satan standing at the high priest's right hand several centuries *after* this psalm was written, and Job's story took place centuries *before* it was written. So, the picture of Satan presented to us in the Old Testament is consistent. He is presented only as a fearsome instrument of God, a cherub anointed with authority to enforce righteousness. Even if someone in those times had dared to think that there might be some "tares" in heaven, he would never have guessed that Satan was one of them.

The Reader should know that the Hebrew word translated "Satan" may also be translated "adversary", as in the following story of Balaam. Had we used "adversary" instead of "Satan" in Psalm 109:6 (above), it would have suggested that the Son was only asking his Father to send a prosecutor, not that he was asking for Satan by name. After much consideration, I opted for the translation I have. Likewise, in translating Balaam's story (Num. 22–24), "Satan" is clearly a better choice than "adversary".

TARES IN HEAVEN: *The Angel and Balaam*

The prophet Balaam was one of the great men of his time. He was a genuine prophet of God, though not an Israelite, famed for his prophetic gift far beyond the borders of his Mesopotamian homeland. However, Balaam succumbed to the lure of the riches and high honor offered to him by Moab's King Balak, and when he left Mesopotamia to go to Moab, "the anger of God was kindled because he went."

God's anger against foolish, covetous, Balaam came in the form of an angel who was sent to kill him (Num. 22:33). We are told that the angel "positioned himself in the road against him, for Satan" (Num. 22:22). And later the angel made this remarkable statement: "Behold! I have come forth for Satan because your way is perverse before me" (Num. 22:32b).

That an angel would have come "for Satan" makes perfect biblical sense. Since Satan is god of this world, and ruled over certain angels, he had authority to send them to earth to carry out

the commands of God issued to him. In this case, God had given the command to slay Balaam, who was using his gift from God to gain wealth and fame.

Before moving on, I should point out that there is another possible, though less likely, translation of the word for Satan in Numbers 22:32b. If the angel who met Balaam had a boastful spirit, the Hebrew preposition in this verse allows for him to have said, “I have come forth like Satan.” It is interesting to imagine this angel proudly comparing himself to the great one, Satan, and that is a possible translation. Whether *for* Satan or *like* Satan, however, the angel was clearly functioning *as* Satan functioned in those days; that is, as an adversary from those who erred from the right path.

TARES IN HEAVEN: *Satan and the Sons of Zeruiah*

In this story, most translations use “adversary” instead of the word “Satan”. However, when Satan’s exalted, heavenly position is understood, it becomes clear that the word “Satan” fits much better in David’s rebuke of his nephew, Abishai.

The three sons of David’s sister, Zeruiah, were renowned, high-ranking officers in David’s army who used an appearance of devotion to David as an excuse to exercise merciless hatred toward David’s enemies. When David was fleeing Jerusalem, just ahead of his son Absalom’s attacking army, a wicked man named Shimei watched from the top of a hill as the weeping king walked through the valley. He angrily mocked, cursed, and pelted with stones the king and those with him as they passed below (2Sam. 16:5–13). Abishai, one of Zeruiah’s sons, grew indignant at this insult to the king and asked permission from David to go “take that dead dog’s head off,” but David refused to allow him to do it, and walked on.

Later, after David’s army defeated Absalom’s army and David returned to Jerusalem, the fearful Shimei came meekly to the king and knelt before him, begging for mercy,

2Samuel 19

21. but Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered and said, “Should not Shimei be put to death for this? He abused the LORD’s anointed!”

22a. Then David said, “What is there between you sons of Zeruiah and me, that you should act like Satan on my behalf today?”⁶⁴

No doubt, Abishai was disappointed that David refused him permission to kill Shimei; at the same time, he very likely felt flattered by being compared with Satan. It was not every day that a man was compared with that fearsome servant of God. But the comparison was just. Joab, the highest ranking of Zeruiah’s three sons, consistently demonstrated Satan’s merciless zeal against transgressors, even after those transgressors had repented. He killed both Abner and Amasa after those two generals ceased fighting against David and offered to join forces with him (2Sam. 3:12–39; 20:9–10). But this unwillingness of Joab to forgive transgressions matches God’s description of His angel to Moses (Ex. 23:20–21). And if God’s angel did not forgive transgressions, then who in David’s time would have seen Joab as evil for not forgiving transgressors, even if the transgressors had stopped transgressing? The answer is no one. Moreover, although David condemned some of Joab’s actions, he allowed him to remain as

⁶⁴ The other possible translation is, “that you should act like an adversary on my behalf today?”

general of his army and did not punish Joab for his satanic zeal against those who had transgressed against David. David had a heart like God's. He was patient. And in the end, he commanded his son Solomon to execute righteous judgment against Joab and kill him (1Kgs. 2:5–6), just as God would later command His Son to execute righteous judgment against Satan and cast him out of heaven.

TARES IN HEAVEN: *Satan and the Avenging Angels*

Satan was by no means the only heavenly being God sent to bring about His judgments. In Psalm 35, for one example, the Son prayed for the Father to send an avenging angel against the men who were scheming to have him killed:

Psalm 35

4. Let them be ashamed, and let them be confounded who are seeking my life!
Let them be turned back and put to shame who devise my harm!
5. Let them be as chaff before the wind, and let the angel of the LORD cast *them* down!
6. Let their way be dark and slippery, and let the angel of the LORD harass them!

Notice the vengeful nature of the acts that the Son prayed for God's angel to carry out; namely, to cast evildoers down into darkness and harass them. If we compare what this angel was called upon to do with what Satan was called upon to do in Psalm 109, the angel comes across as more destructive than Satan. In Psalm 109, the Son asked only that God send Satan to prosecute a transgressor, but here, he asks that God send His angel to inflict actual suffering.

When God described the angel that He was sending before Israel into Canaan's land, Moses must have trembled:

Exodus 23

20. Behold, I am sending an angel before you to protect you along the way and to bring you into the place that I have prepared.
21. Beware of him, and obey his voice. Provoke him not, for he will not pardon your transgressions, for my name is in him.

The similarities between this angel and Satan are striking. Both were used by God in matters concerning His chosen people, both had great power, and both were utterly merciless. Most of us consider this merciless angel to be holy; at the same time, we consider Satan to be wicked, although nothing in the Old Testament indicates wickedness in either of those heavenly beings. The only reason we think that way about Satan is that "the Son of God has come and has given us understanding" (1Jn. 5:20). We had no other way to come to the knowledge that one of those two servants of God was evil.

The awe which God's avenging angels inspired among ancient people, and perhaps even among some heavenly beings, may have surpassed the awe that Satan inspired. As far as the biblical record is concerned, those angels afflicted far more people, far more often, and far more cruelly than Satan ever did. The cruelest of Satan's activities recorded in the Old Testament are those we have already discussed. They are:

- He obeyed God's command to afflict Job.
- He and God moved David to number Israel.
- He stood up for God's law and prosecuted transgressors in heaven's court.

None of those activities were evil. Moreover, Satan is never said to have inflicted the massive damage and destruction attributed to God's angels:

- Angels destroyed four populated cities with fire from heaven (Gen. 19:1–25).
- “Fierce angels” struck Egypt with a series of horrific plagues (Ps. 78:49).
- An angel from God struck Israel with a plague that killed seventy thousand Israelites (2Sam. 24:15).
- In one night, the angel of the LORD slaughtered 185,000 Assyrians (2Kgs. 19:35).

If the deeds of these angels did not cause others to think of them as evil, then what basis existed for anyone to think of Satan as evil? It was only when the Son of God came that Satan was exposed as the liar and murderer that he is (Jn. 8:44). Before then, no one associated Satan with either lies or murder because, as far as anyone except God knew, Satan had never been guilty of those crimes.

But God did not limit Himself to the use of Satan and angels to bring about His righteous judgments. He also used nature (Ezek. 13:10–14), animals (2Kgs. 2:23–24; Joel 2:25), and both righteous and unrighteous men (Samuel in 1Sam. 15:32–33 and Baasha in 1Kgs. 15:25–27). He also used nations to destroy other nations, as when he sent the Israelites to brutally conquer the very sinful Canaanites (Dt. 9:4–5; Josh. 10:40) and as when he sent the Babylonians to conquer the Israelites after they had become very sinful. If wickedness is to be determined on the basis of the degree of pain and death inflicted, then if we compare what humans and angels did in the Old Testament to what Satan did, we would have to conclude that humans and angels are more wicked than Satan!

But let's take this concept even further. In many instances, we are told that God Himself brought about terrible suffering and death without the use of agents, either heavenly or earthly. In the first book of the Bible, God Himself is said to have covered the earth with a flood, all but wiping out the human race (Gen. 7:21–22). In the book of Numbers, God is said to have created a new way to kill men by opening up the earth beneath the tents of Dathan and Abiram and carrying those wicked men and their families alive down into the abyss (Num. 16:28–33). Hundreds of verses in the books of the prophets tell us that God sent or threatened to send all sorts of miseries on mankind, Jew and Gentile alike. God *may* have used agents in all those events, but even if He did, the fact remains that God is responsible for the sufferings that His agents bring about. So then, if greater damage equals greater wickedness, what are we to think about what the Old Testament tells us about God in comparison to what the Old Testament tells us about Satan? Who, God or Satan, is said to have inflicted the greater amount of suffering upon men?

Again, my point is not that Satan is good. He most certainly is not. My point is only that until the Son came and paid the price for men to receive God's kind of life, no one could see that Satan was evil.

TARES IN HEAVEN: *The Lying Spirit*

In hiding the Son, God was hiding the truth about everything, most of all, the truth about Himself, His inner thoughts and feelings. He was hiding Michael and Gabriel, for no one knew that God saw them as good. He was hiding Satan, for no one knew that God saw him as evil. In the book of Job, as we saw, Satan was introduced only as one of the sons of God, perfectly relaxed as he conversed with God. The following story shows that Satan was not the only evil spirit that felt at home in heaven.

During the reign of wicked King Ahab, God gave the prophet Micaiah a vision of a gathering of the sons of God in which God patiently conversed with a lying spirit that volunteered to come to earth and speak through the false prophets of Jezebel and Ahab.

1Kings 22

19. *Micaiah* said, “I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing about Him, to His right and to His left.
20. And the LORD said, ‘Who will entice Ahab to go up and die at Ramoth-gilead?’ And one answered this way, and another answered that way.
21. Then a spirit there came forth and stood before the LORD, and said, ‘I will persuade him.’ And the LORD said to him, ‘How?’
22. And he said, ‘I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ And He said, ‘You will entice him, and will surely succeed. Go on and do so!’”

A superficial reading of this scene might lead one to think that God was asking for advice. He has never done that. Everything He does, He does “according to the counsel of His own will” (Eph. 1:11). What God was doing in this meeting of the sons of God was creating another situation that would bring into the open what was hidden in the hearts of the spirits that were before Him in heaven. His humility and patience made those spirits feel relaxed and free to express what they truly felt. It is important that we see this scene rightly, for what it tells us is that the angels that sinned were not coerced; they freely chose the wrong path, the same way Satan did. Satan did not force them to do evil; on the contrary, God liberated them with His patience and humility to be who they really wanted to be. Michael and Gabriel did not force faithful angels to make their choice, either; God liberated the faithful angels, too, to be who they really wanted to be.

At the heavenly meeting that Micaiah saw in his vision, each spirit’s suggestion, whether good or bad, exposed what was in that spirit’s heart, for “out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks” (Mt. 12:34). What each one said became a matter of record so that when the Son finally made known the mind of God, all of heaven’s creatures would understand why some were cast out and others were allowed to stay.

The crafty spirit that volunteered to deceive Ahab’s prophets had no idea how contemptible he was in God’s sight. No doubt, he congratulated himself all the way from heaven to earth because God had chosen him over all others in heaven to do this deed. And after he succeeded in deceiving Ahab by lying to him through his prophets (a case of what we now see as demonic possession of those prophets), there was nothing to prevent that lying spirit from joyfully returning to heaven to bask in the glory of his success. How could he possibly have known that

God saw him as doing evil? God did not tell him. The Son remained hidden. And that lying spirit assumed, as Satan did, that God was just like him.

To confirm that this sort of thing took place in heaven before the Son was revealed, we need only to read Ezekiel 14:1–11. There, when some hypocritical elders came to Ezekiel, making a show of wanting to hear the word of the LORD, God was indignant. He told Ezekiel that when the disobedient came to hear from Him, He would not answer. Instead, He would send a lying spirit to deceive their false prophets and then destroy both them and their prophets for their hypocrisy.

“You Thought”

Satan, being full of pride and assuming too much, misjudged everything badly, but his worst error was in assuming that God was like him. Psalm 50 mentions a similar wrong assumption made by an unnamed, wicked man. After the psalmist lists the man’s evil deeds, God spoke through the psalmist to expose that man’s secret thought:

Psalm 50

21. These things you have done, and I remained silent. You thought that I was altogether *such a one* as yourself.

The only way Satan could possibly have hoped, as he did, to be elevated to reign with God was for him to think that God was “altogether such a one” as himself.⁶⁵ Of course, Satan *was* more like God, *as he thought God was*, than any other creature. After all, he would have reasoned, had not God chosen him over all others to prove the faith of Job, the most perfect man on earth? And had not God chosen him to provoke King David to number Israel? And was he not the one appointed to stand up for God’s law when Joshua, Israel’s high priest, failed to keep the law? And in Psalm 109, was he not the one called for when an Accuser against a wicked man was needed? In addition, there must have been many other times when God used Satan to carry out His designs and many other court cases in heaven that Satan did not lose, all of which would only have made Satan think more highly of himself.

Satan was created with sufficient wisdom to understand that God knew what was in his heart. It is impossible to believe that Satan thought his desire for the highest of honors was hidden from his Maker. Therefore, Satan’s error could only have been in assuming that God approved of it. But Satan’s dream of sharing in God’s glory was the ultimate self-delusion. He was nothing like God in heart. God did seem to have a close relationship with Satan, but that was only because God was not yet letting anyone know what He really thought about anything. He had ordained a specific time for His Son to be revealed, and with him, the truth.

God’s patience is terrifying.

TARES ON EARTH: JUDAS

Jesus knew all along that Judas would betray him (Jn. 6:71), but the other disciples never saw Jesus treat Judas in a way different from the way he treated them. They never suspected that

⁶⁵ Since Satan had a self-serving motive for doing everything he did, and since he thought that he and God were alike, he likely believed he was telling Eve the truth about God when he told her that God had a self-serving motive for keeping her and Adam from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Jesus was demonstrating, the whole time, the Father's terrifying patience with wickedness. Judas was taught as they were, anointed as they were, and sent out as they were, with power to work miracles (Mt. 10:1–4). No doubt, Judas did many good deeds during the years he traveled with Jesus. If anything, the disciples held Judas in special regard because Jesus seemed to. Jesus had even chosen Judas over Matthew, a professional money-handler, to carry the moneybag and to distribute the funds that were in it (Jn. 12:4–6). So, it must have appeared to everyone that Judas held a special place in Jesus' heart, and judging by what the Son of God foretold through David about Judas, such may have been the case:

Psalm 55

12. It was not an enemy that reproached me; then, I could have borne it. Neither was it one who hated me that puffed himself up against me; in that case, I would have hidden myself from him.
13. But it was you, a man my own equal, my guide, and my acquaintance.
14. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company.

The parable of the Wheat and the Tares was intended by Jesus to alert his disciples to God's fearful patience with evil, a patience that the Father had quietly exhibited in heaven for thousands of years. Now, in his dealing with Judas, the Son provided his disciples with a similar example on earth.

At the Last Supper, just moments after Jesus told his disciples that one of them would betray him, Jesus looked at Judas and said, "What you do, do quickly" (Jn. 13:21–27). Knowing what we know now, on this side of Pentecost, we see Jesus' statement to Judas as a clear indication that Judas was the betrayer, but at that time, to Jesus' disciples, Judas was above suspicion, and they did not put it all together. Instead, they all assumed that Jesus had sent his friend Judas on an errand (Jn. 13:27–29), just as the angels in heaven had often watched God send Satan to earth on errands.

The author of Hebrews described the Son as the exact representation of the Father's being (Heb. 1:3), and in no way did the Son more perfectly reflect the Father than in his handling of his Satan-like disciple, Judas. Jesus' patience is also terrifying.

WHEN GOD IS QUIET

Like tares growing in the midst of heaven's wheat, creatures whose hearts had turned from goodness were allowed to continue in heaven for a very long time before the Son was revealed. God quietly watched them live, labor, and worship with heavenly creatures whose hearts were upright. The quiet patience of God determined everything by providing all His heavenly creatures with time and liberty to be who they really wanted to be. God's demeanor created the situation in which the heart of every creature in heaven was tried without them even knowing they were being tried. His creatures felt completely free, and yet, God was always in complete control.

Romans 11

33. Oh, the depth of the riches of both the wisdom and the knowledge of God!
How unsearchable *are* His judgments, and inscrutable His ways!
34. Who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has been His counsellor?

God's withholding of correction, His silence when sin is committed, is a most fearful form of divine wrath. David was right when he said that whoever is corrected by God is blessed (Ps. 94:12). And by whatever name God's correction is called – whether discipline, chastisement, instruction, or anything else – to be given it is to be loved, and it is a precious gift that all wise men pray for. *It is impossible to know whom God loves by seeing whom He blesses; it is only by seeing whom God chastens that we know whom He loves.*

Proverbs 3

11. My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of His correction,
12. for whom the LORD loves, He corrects, even as a father the son in whom he delights.

Revelation 3

19. As many as I hold dear, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous, therefore, and repent!

It is also true that we cannot know who loves God, based upon who worships Him. Everyone in heaven worshipped God, but God did nothing until the Son was revealed to indicate that the worship of some of His heavenly sons was unacceptable. They all knew that God hated and was angry with the wicked every day (Pss. 5:5; 7:11), but they did not know that God saw some of *them* as wicked. So, evil spirits and good spirits rejoiced and worshipped as one congregation in God's presence. God did hate the wicked; He hated them with perfect hatred (Ps. 139:22). But perfect hatred can wait, the way Absalom waited two years to kill Amnon (2Sam. 13:22–29). It is perfect love that rebukes and chastens (Prov. 3:11–12; Heb. 12:6; Rev. 3:19).

To this day, evil spirits, including Satan, worship God. Paul said as much when he said (1) Satan is now “disguising himself as a messenger of light” (2Cor. 11:14) and (2) demons devise doctrines about God and His Son that appeal even to many of God's own children (1Tim. 4:1). Heaven's creatures were created to be deeply religious, and they cannot alter that work of God (Eccl. 3:14). Satan and his angels were cast out of heaven, but they cannot cease from doing what they were created to do, even if the way they do it is unacceptable. It may help the Reader to understand this if it is remembered that Jesus never called harlots and drunkards sons of the Accuser. He gave that title only to those considered to be good people. Satan and his sons despise the irreligious. He and his sons thrive in a religious environment, and Satan encourages them to perform solemn religious rites and to enforce rules of good conduct. After all, while he was in heaven, that is what he did.

Jesus criticized Satan's sons for doing the will of their father (Jn. 8:44). But what were they doing? According to Jesus, those sons of the Accuser fasted twice a week (Lk. 18:12), made long prayers (Mt. 23:14), spent great sums on missionary work (Mt. 23:15), gave tithes of everything that came into their possession (Mt. 23:23), and insisted that transgressors, such as the woman caught in adultery, be punished to the full extent of Moses' law (Jn. 8:1–11). Satan's sons were pillars of the community; they would not have gotten drunk or committed adultery for any amount of money. Their righteousness was seen by all. (They made sure of that.) They

strictly observed the law's rites and rules, along with the religious traditions of their elders. However, their maintenance of proper form only provided a cover for the wickedness that was in their hearts, just like their father, Satan. That was the judgment of God revealed by the Son when he told those deeply religious men, "You are they who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts! That which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God" (Lk. 16:15).

Nothing is more highly esteemed in this world than man's religious creeds and ceremonies. But without the life of God, the more eloquent and lovely a religion is, the more of an abomination it is because the greater number of souls it will attract and deceive. Israel's scribes, Pharisees, and priests seemed to be good men doing what was right, but then, so did Satan and evil angels in heaven. Solomon said that there are ways that seem right to men but that lead to death (Prov. 14:12; 16:25). Nevertheless, ignoring that godly warning, most people prefer the righteousness that *seems* good over the righteousness that *is* good, for it is human nature to "love the honor of men more than the honor of God" (Jn. 12:43).

Paul acknowledged that God's patient use of the wicked while allowing them to continue in sin seems unfair to some people (Rom. 9:19), but then he bluntly pointed out that God's purpose for being patient with the wicked is no one's business but God's (Rom. 9:20–21). The sum of Paul's argument was this: "So what, if God, desiring to demonstrate His wrath and to make known His power, endured with great patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction?" (Rom. 9:22). *Who is man*, Paul would have asked, *to grumble about what the Creator does with His creatures?* The inescapable reality is that God is using all of us all the time, even the proudest and most rebellious among us. May we all find grace to be used as "vessels of honor" rather than of dishonor (2Tim. 2:20–21), for vessels of dishonor, after a lifetime of wrong-headed service to God, will be rejected and cast away (cp. 1Cor. 9:27).

When God is quiet, what do we think of ourselves or of others? If we dare even to think that we know what to think when God has revealed nothing, we are foolish. *When God has revealed nothing, nothing is known.*

THE POINT

Because of the Son, we all know now that Satan and some of the angels are wicked. But *our* knowledge of their wickedness is not the point. The point of this chapter is to show that God patiently allowed tares to grow in His heavenly wheat field and that no one anywhere knew what He was doing. His wisdom and knowledge were hidden in the Son, and until God revealed him, no one anywhere knew God. So great was the blindness in heaven concerning good and evil that the relationship God appeared to have with Satan and his angels secured their reputation among the sons of God; it certainly did not ruin it. All the sons of God heard God say, for instance, that Satan moved Him to afflict righteous Job for no reason (Job 2:3), and who, they would have asked, could move the Almighty to do anything but an exceptionally wise and powerful being?⁶⁶

⁶⁶ The fallen human race is, in at least one earthly respect, better off with Satan's influence than they would be without it. Satan's desire to reign with God in His kingdom shows that he values order, for God's kingdom has perfect order. Jesus himself plainly stated that Satan's rule was orderly (Mt. 12:25–26), and the order imposed on man by the governments and religions of the world (all of them under Satan) benefit mankind by restraining man's unruly nature. Satan cannot change man's nature, but through earthly authorities, Satan influences humans to behave better than they would behave without those authorities.

On this side of Pentecost, the tares in God's kingdom are His uncorrected children on earth. Their wickedness, like Satan's, is not apparent, and that is why they so often escape notice. They have some knowledge and experience in the things of God, as well as gifts and testimonies that win hearts. And they are confident, as Satan once was, that God approves of them. In no Old Testament story do we see Satan doing anything but what God wanted done; and yet, unknown to anyone, God was judging him the entire time as wicked. Likewise, the tares among the saints on earth may prophesy, cast out demons, perform miracles, hear things from Jesus, and feast in the Spirit with fellow believers (Mt. 7:22; Lk. 13:26). But when they feast with the saints, they are only eating and drinking damnation upon themselves because they are feasting "unworthily" (1Cor. 11:27–29). The apostle Paul gave us blunt exhortations concerning this:

Romans 11

22. Behold the goodness and severity of God; on those who fell, severity, but toward you, goodness – if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise, you, too, will be cut off.

And to this sober warning, Paul added one of the most famous exhortations to faithfulness found in the New Testament:

1Corinthians 10

11. All these things happened to them as examples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have met.
12. Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.



A BRIEF PERSONAL NOTE

Before entering into this challenging chapter, let me remind my Reader, because it bears repeating, that New Testament men of God plainly taught that from the beginning of the world, the existence of the Son of God was hidden from all creatures. In each chapter, we have been building upon that revelation, bit by bit, as the prophet once said:

Isaiah 28

9. *Whom shall He teach knowledge? And whom shall He make to understand doctrine? Those weaned from milk; those taken from breasts.*
10. *For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little.*

Dread of adverse reactions from others can make us afraid to build upon revealed truth; that is, fear of man can make us afraid to think the next thought that God offers us. And it can be especially confusing when contrary reactions rise before we even express the next thought that God gives us, but such does happen because God's light is always felt before it is spoken. The light of God's thoughts so challenges the dark corners of human hearts that people can sense that it is about to shine through us even before it is fully formed in our minds. But we are called to be fearless and to let Jesus think the next thought in us.

In this chapter, we will continue on to think the next thought. We will consider the earthly life of Jesus as it is recorded in the Gospels, asking the question, "Being without the knowledge of God, what did the characters in these stories think was happening?" For example, we are told that Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. At that time, however, all truth was still hidden in the Son, and nobody, not even Satan, knew what was truly taking place. So, what did Satan think was happening between him and Jesus in the wilderness? What did Satan think God's purpose was for sending him from heaven to say the things he said to Jesus? And if the truth about the Messiah and about the Son was still hidden, what did Peter think he was saying when he confessed that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God? The answers to such questions are revealed in the next thought, and we must dare to think it.

The apostles had to dare to think the next thought in order to receive revelation knowledge; let us be the same way. Jesus said that the truth would make us free (Jn. 8:32), but the truth does not make us free unless we receive and follow it, wherever it leads. Let the truth think the next thought for you now, as we read the story of the Son of God on earth.



Chapter 7

The Son in the World

Inasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood,
he likewise partook of flesh with them.

Hebrews 2:14a

SECTION 1: THE NEW MAN

Put on the new man, who in God's likeness is created
in righteousness and true holiness.

Ephesians 4:24

“A MAN IN APPEARANCE”

From the moment God's Son came from heaven and took on the fleshly body that his Father had prepared for him, there was never again a Son of God/son of Mary difference. God's Son was blended with Mary's son “so that he might make of those two, in himself, one new man.”⁶⁷ Jesus of Nazareth became forever the Son of God from heaven, and the Son of God from heaven became forever Jesus of Nazareth. Paul was right to say that God's Son was “born of a woman, born under the law” (Gal. 4:4), and the author of Hebrews was right to say that when the Son came from heaven, a man's body had already been prepared for him (Heb. 10:5). Moreover, Jesus was right to tell Pilate both that he had been born *and* that he had come into the world (Jn. 18:37).

Paul said that the hidden Son of God became “a man in appearance” (Phip. 2:8), which is to say that he became a man; however, the man he became looked the same as he looked before the Son of God became him. Nothing about Jesus' appearance was altered by his new birth experience to show that he had been re-created. This extraordinary event signaled the dawning of a new and eternal age; however, the Son was invisible and unknown, and no one understood the signal. Men could only see the body that the Son had taken on, and that body revealed nothing about him.

⁶⁷ The phrase is from Ephesians 2:15, where the “two” are two groups of people, the Jews and the Gentiles. I borrowed Paul's phrase here to describe the “new man” who was created by the blending of God's Son with Mary's.

All four of the Gospels tell of the epochal moment when the Son of God descended from heaven in the form of a dove to enter into the body prepared for him:

Matthew 3 (cp. Mk. 1:10–11; Lk. 3:21–22; Jn. 1:32)

16. After he had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water, and suddenly, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending in the form of a dove, and coming upon him.
17. And, behold, *there came* a voice from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

So, when the Son of God began his life on earth, it was *as a man*, not as an infant in a manger, and certainly not as an embryo in Mary’s womb. God’s Son did not possess Mary’s body when he came; rather, he took on himself the body of her grown-up son. Mary was not the mother of the hidden Son of God who created the universe. She was the mother of the child that God created in her womb. And when God sent His Son from heaven to become one with Mary’s son, a new kind of creature was created, a creature with a corruptible human body that was filled with God’s incorruptible kind of life.

When that eternal life was given to Jesus’ followers on the day of Pentecost, a new nation was instantly “created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24). These new men were re-created by the life of God to be like the Son *after he came to earth*, with fully-grown earthly bodies filled with God’s kind of life. When those 120 men and women were born again, they were not born again as little babies any more than Jesus was. They, too, were born “as men in appearance”, though they were newborns to God.

“SON OF GOD”

By the time of Jesus, the title “son of God” or “sons of God” had long been in use as a reference to heavenly beings, but both humans and angels would have understood “son of God” to be a mere figure of speech, a way to express God’s fatherhood over His creation. God Himself even used the phrase figuratively (Mal. 1:6). None of heaven’s creatures and no one in Israel with scriptural knowledge would have suspected that God *really* had a Son. Such a thing, they would have thought, was beneath God’s dignity, even blasphemous.⁶⁸ Only the heathen believed the myths concerning gods and goddesses begetting sons and daughters by mortals,⁶⁹ and their faith in that lie was so strong that they did not hesitate to suspect someone of being a god or a son of the gods if he performed extraordinary deeds. Gentiles, for example, called the apostle Paul a god on at least two occasions (Acts 14:11; 28:3–6).

⁶⁸ This opinion was later given strong expression in the Koran, which insists that it is disrespectful to God to say that He begot a son: “*Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a Messenger of Allah . . . Allah is one Allah: (far Exalted is He) above having a son*” (4:171). “*Praise be to Allah who begets no son, and has no partner in His dominion*” (17:111). “*No son did Allah beget, nor is there any god along with Him*” (23:91). Translation by Hafiz Abdullah Jusef Ali.

⁶⁹ Hercules and Achilles are two of many examples. Hercules was believed to have been fathered by the supreme god, Zeus, with an earthly female, Alcmena. Achilles, on the other hand, had an earthly father but a goddess, Thetis, for his mother. Gentiles also believed that a few humans, by virtue of extraordinary deeds or gifts, had been taken from earth to be numbered among the gods. For instance, Zeus elevated Ganymede to become a god because the youth was so handsome that Zeus wanted him as a lover.

When the Gentile king, Nebuchadnezzar, saw a fourth man walking about in the blazing furnace with the three young Hebrew men that he had cast in there, he had no reason to say that the fourth man in the fiery furnace looked like *the* Son of God, as Christian translators usually have it. It is much more in keeping with the times for the king to have said what any other Gentile then would have said; to wit, the fourth man looked “like *a* son of God” (Dan. 3:25), and that is exactly what we find in the original language.

Occasionally, it is necessary to add *the* to a phrase when one is translating, but by adding *the* to “son of God” at the wrong time, Christian translators of the New Testament miss the opportunity to communicate the ancient, universal ignorance of the Son. An example of this is the famous comment of the centurion who oversaw the crucifixion of Jesus. Awestruck at the unnatural darkness and the earthquake that attended Jesus’ death, that Roman soldier responded exactly as Nebuchadnezzar did, and exactly as one would expect of Gentiles who lived before the Son of God was revealed:

Matthew 27

54. When the centurion and those who were guarding Jesus with him saw the earthquake and the *other* things that happened, they were very afraid and said, “This man really was a son of a god!”

Christian translators know about the Son of God, and when they add *the* to what this Roman said, it leaves the impression that ancient Romans knew about the Son of God, too. They most certainly did not. No one did. Paul pointed out the obvious fact that if men had known the Son of God, they would not have crucified him (1Cor. 2:7–8). In his Gospel, Luke describes this event in a way that communicates much better what the polytheistic centurion was actually thinking:

Luke 23

47. When the centurion saw that happen, he honored God, saying, “Surely this was a righteous man.”

Remarkably, those in Israel who believed that the Messiah was coming held the Messiah in such high esteem that they felt that “Son of God” was an appropriate title for him. Peter himself was an example of this:

Matthew 16

16. Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!”

Matthew 26 (cp. Lk. 22:66–70)

- 63b. The high priest said to him, “I adjure you by the living God that you tell us whether you are the Messiah, the Son of God!”

Neither Peter, the high priest, nor anyone else used the phrase “Son of God” as a reference to the Son of God who had been hidden in heaven from the beginning of creation and “through whom God made the worlds”. Nobody knew about *that* Son.

Just as we do not know how the Jews came to believe that no one would know where the Messiah came from (Jn. 7:27), neither do we know how the Jews came to believe that the Messiah would be so special that the title “Son of God” should apply to him. No Old Testament

scripture calls him that. No man in biblical history was ever called “Son of God”,⁷⁰ and for the Jews to be willing to attribute that title to a man reveals that they expected their Messiah to be extraordinarily great.

When Jesus came up on the bank of the Jordan after he was baptized, John the Baptist must have been deeply impressed when he heard the voice from heaven say, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” And yet, John (and whoever else heard that voice) could only have thought that God was speaking of *Mary’s* son, for it was not His Son’s mere coming to earth that revealed him. The pre-existent Son was still hidden from man because people without God’s kind of life do not know the Son, no matter where he is. Although the Son came into this world, “his own people did not receive him” (Jn. 1:11) because they did not know who he was. The Son was revealed only after he returned to heaven and sent back the Spirit so that people could have the kind of life that would enable them to know him and his Father.

Mary’s son is all that Satan saw, too. When Satan heard God express pleasure in His Son on the day the Son entered into his temple, Satan may have been impressed, as John the Baptist was, but seeing only Mary’s son, he would not have been intimidated in the least. Satan himself was a son of God, and he was certain that God was better pleased with him than He was with any of His sons, including this Messiah from Nazareth. Besides, he knew that he existed before this man Jesus did, and like John the Baptist, he understood that the one who existed first was greater.

As miraculous as Jesus’ birth was, nobody had seen anything miraculous about Jesus since then. The pre-baptism Jesus was entirely human, living as a human in a world of other humans. Nothing about him stood out, just as Isaiah foretold (Isa. 53:2). No halo encircled his head. His hometown was insignificant. His parents were nobodies, and contrary to Christian mythology, the pre-baptism Jesus performed no miracles and had no special knowledge of God, although even as a child, he certainly loved Him. Jesus’ comment at the age of twelve, “I must be about my Father’s business” (Lk. 2:49), was a sweet statement, but it was not earth-shattering. Young children who are taught about God often feel a deep, innocent love for Him, and when they feel those feelings, they can make some arresting statements. But it was only after God’s Son came from heaven and became one with Mary’s son on the bank of the Jordan that Jesus began saying and doing earth-shattering things.

In sum, the fact that God had a Son was not revealed either by the birth of Mary’s son in Bethlehem or by the arrival of God’s Son at Jesus’ baptism. Even after the Son had lived and labored on earth for years, men did not know him (Jn. 14:9). The revelation of the Son came to men only after they received God’s kind of life. In other words, men began to truly see the Son only after he went away.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH

We began this chapter at the Jordan River instead of the city of Bethlehem because the Son of God made his advent into the world at the Jordan River in the form of a dove, not in Bethlehem in the form of an infant. The virgin birth had to take place, but it took place only as part of God’s

⁷⁰ The plural “*sons* of God” is applied to humans in Hosea 1:10, but that was a prophecy of God’s New Testament people, who were not yet in existence. The only instance of the phrase “sons of God” being applied to living humans before Jesus’ time is found in Genesis 6:1–4. Some believe that the “sons of God” referred to in Genesis 6 were angels, but based on what Jesus said in Matthew 22:30 and Mark 12:25, they must have been human.

preparation of an earthly temple for His Son, who came to earth about thirty years after the birth of Mary's son (Lk. 3:23). Jesus' birth was a glorious event, but the coming of God's Son to earth was more glorious. Jesus' birth was essential to our salvation. However, it is unwise to esteem that holy physical event more highly than the much holier spiritual event of the coming of God's hidden Son.

It will help put the birth of Jesus into perspective if we remember that Gabriel's appearance to Mary was not the first time God had sent an angel to earth to tell a woman that she would bare a son. Long before Mary's visitation, God sent an angel to Manoah's barren wife to tell her that she would bear an especially anointed son, Samson, who would deliver Israel (Judg. 13:2–5). Even before then, however, God was known as a God who miraculously gives children to women, as in the cases of the elderly Sarah and barren Rebekah (Gen. 21:1–2; 25:1). And later, He did the same for both Hannah and the Shunammite woman who helped Elisha (1Sam. 1:1–2; 2:7; 2Kgs. 4:14–17). Lastly, about six months before Gabriel was sent to Mary, God sent him to the old priest Zacharias to tell him he would have a son (Lk. 1:5–13). So, God was known in Israel for His power to give children to those who could not have them:

Psalm 113

5. Who *is* like the LORD our God, who has made His home on high?
...
9. He makes the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children. Hallelujah!

Much of what humans think is impossible is the norm in the spiritual realm. The words *impossible* and *miracle* probably do not even exist in the vocabulary of angels. The only thing at which angels have ever marveled is the life of God that believers receive (1Pet. 1:12). When the heavenly host rejoiced in the night sky at the birth of Jesus (Lk. 2:13–14), they were not rejoicing because God had somehow managed to make a virgin have a baby; they were rejoicing because they knew that the child was God's chosen one, the Messiah. The angel who spoke with the shepherds that night said so:

Luke 2

8. And there were shepherds in the same country, staying in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.
9. And behold, an angel of the LORD suddenly appeared to them, and the glory of the LORD shone round about them, and they were very afraid.
10. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. Behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which shall be for all the people!
11. For today, in the city of David, a Savior is born unto you, who is Messiah and Lord!"

Mary's virginity presented God with no more an obstacle than did Sarah's age or Hannah's infertility. After all, John the Baptist declared that God was able to raise up children from stones (Mt. 3:9). Of course, the angels knew that was true before John said it, for they had been witnesses to what God did in the valley of dry bones (Ezek. 37:1–10). Mary being both a virgin and a mother was only a sign, the special sign that God had told Israel to look for (Isa. 7:14).

What the angels thought the Messiah was going to do is unknown, but they certainly were not rejoicing because they knew what God had in mind; that was a secret He kept from everyone. They may have been thinking what both Satan and Jesus' disciples would later think; namely, that Jesus was anointed to rule the world and to "re-establish the kingdom of Israel" (Acts 1:6). They had no idea that God had a Son before Mary did. Nothing about Jesus' miraculous birth revealed to anyone in heaven or on earth that God had a Son. The birth of Jesus, miraculous as it was, was only that – miraculous. It revealed nothing about the hidden Son of God. In the eyes of Satan and all others in heaven, Jesus' birth was only one of a number of miraculous births they had seen, this one with the added element of the mother's virginity, which served only as a sign that this child was the Messiah.

GOD'S LAMB, NOT JOSEPH'S

God had to be the actual Father of the one He would sacrifice for the sins of the world because it would have been unjust for Him to use someone else's son. According to the law that God gave to Israel, whatever was offered in sacrifice had to belong to the person who was offering it. If you took your neighbor's lamb to make a sacrifice for your sin, you were not forgiven; you were a thief. The law showed God's people how to love one another, and in creating a child in Mary's womb, God was showing great love for every father on earth by leaving their sons alone. The virgin birth assured that the Lamb that God sacrificed for the sins of the world belonged to Him. When John the Baptist saw Jesus approaching him to be baptized, the Spirit cried out through John, "Behold! The Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn. 1:29). Jesus was *God's* sacrifice for sin, not Joseph's. God's righteousness and justice compelled Him to send His own Son to the cross. That is the reason for God causing Mary to conceive; without any question, that made Jesus, physically, God's Son.

King David understood this principle. That is why he refused Araunah's generous offer when the desperate king needed animals for sacrifice in order to stop a plague:

2Samuel 24

21. Araunah said, "Why has my master the king come to his servant?" And David said, "To buy this threshing floor from you, to build an altar unto the LORD so that the plague may be stayed from the people."
22. And Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up whatever he wants. Look, *here are* the oxen for a burnt offering. And for the wood, *here are* threshing sledges and the instruments for the oxen."
23. All these, O king, does Araunah give to the king." And then Araunah said to the king, "May the LORD your God accept you!"
24. But the king said to Araunah, "No. I must buy it from you for a price. I will not offer to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." So, David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

David knew that if he did not own those oxen when he offered them, then God would refuse the sacrifice, and the plague would continue.

Another requirement of the law was that the owner of the sacrificial animal was the one who had to slay it. God knew man. He knew that if a man fell on hard times, he might well regret the

sacrifices and offerings he had brought to God in the past. And if the priest had been the one who killed a man's animals, that man could become bitter against the priest. God's law protected the priests by requiring each man to kill his own animal. Only after that did the priests' work begin, the priests being the only ones anointed to lay the slaughtered animals upon God's altar for sacrifice.

Leviticus 1

4. He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted for him to make atonement for him.
- 5a. And he shall kill the bullock before the LORD. Then the sons of Aaron, the priests, will bring the blood near.

Those who crucified Jesus were not struck dead by God because God was the One killing His Lamb (Isa. 53:10). Satan and wicked men were only doing what the Lamb's owner had determined should be done (Acts 4:28). It was because Jesus knew who was really killing him that he did not plead with the Roman soldiers to spare him the agony of crucifixion. Instead, he pleaded with his Father:

Mark 14

32. And they came to a parcel of land which was called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go pray."
33. But he took Peter, James, and John with him, and he began to feel overwhelmed and distressed.
34. And he said to them, "My soul is grieved to death. Stay here and watch."
35. Then, going on a little farther, he fell to the ground and began praying that, if it were possible, the hour would pass from him.
36. And he said, "Abba (*that is*, Father), all things are possible with you. Take this cup away from me! Nevertheless, not what I will, but what you *will*."

When Jesus ended his prayer that night, he told his disciples that what he was about to suffer was the cup his Father had given him to drink (Jn. 18:11). Even on the cross, Jesus remembered that the ones torturing him were ignorant of what God was doing, and therefore, they were also ignorant of what *they* were doing (Lk. 23:34). According to the pattern prescribed by the law, then, God voluntarily "gave His only begotten Son so that all who believe in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16).

THE OWNER, WILLINGLY

Another of the law's basic requirements for sacrifices, to make them acceptable to God, is that they had to be willingly offered.

Leviticus 1 (cp. Lev. 19:5; 22:29)

3. If his offering be a burnt sacrifice from the herd, . . . he shall bring it to the door of the tent of meeting, *and* of his own will, he shall offer it before the LORD.

If Jesus had belonged to Joseph, it is very unlikely that Joseph would have *willingly* offered him up as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Besides the fact that no man on earth

would even have believed such a thing possible, anyone in Israel familiar with the law, as Joseph no doubt was, knew that God abhorred human sacrifice. Not only did God strictly forbid that cruel practice, but He even threatened with damnation anyone who failed to kill a man found sacrificing a human (Lev. 20:2–5). God hid much in Old Testament time, but He did not hide His profound grief and indignation when Israel began sacrificing their children to bloodthirsty Gentile gods:

Jeremiah 19 (cp. Jer. 32:33–35)

4. They have forsaken me, and have estranged this place *from me*. They have burned incense in it to other gods, whom neither they, nor their fathers, nor the kings of Judah have known, and they have filled this place with the blood of innocents.
5. They have also built the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire as burnt offerings for Baal, which I did not command, and did not speak, nor did it come into my mind!

Who in Israel could have believed that anybody's son could be an acceptable sacrifice for sin when the prophets had made it clear that human sacrifice was an abomination to God? Certainly not a good man like Joseph.⁷¹ Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son, but only at God's command, and even at that, it was not a sacrifice for sin. In the end, God would not allow even that kind of human sacrifice. It was only a test of Abraham's faith. God alone had a Son worthy to be sacrificed for man's sin.

No sane father on earth would have believed that he could sacrifice his son to atone for the sins of everyone on earth, including "sins that are past" (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:15). Paul said that it was all but impossible to find someone willing to die even for good people (Rom. 5:7), much less an entire world of sinners. But even if a father were found who believed that he could offer his son as a sacrifice for the world's sins, he certainly would not have *voluntarily* offered up his *only* son, especially a dutiful and wise son like Jesus (Lk. 2:40), and even more especially if that son trusted him completely and was devoted to him.

SECTION 2: THE TEMPTATION

The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness,
and he was there in the wilderness, tempted forty days by Satan.

Mark 1:12–13a

NOTHING HAD CHANGED

To say, as Paul did, that Jesus was born under the law (Gal. 4:4) is to say that when Jesus was born, the law of Moses was still in effect, just as it had been in the days of Joshua, David, and the prophets. And decades later, at the time of Jesus' baptism, nothing about the law had changed. Nothing about Satan had changed, either. He was still one of the sons of God who stood in

⁷¹ Even if a man had offered up his son as a sacrifice for the world's sins, it would have been unacceptable to God because all humans, including Mary's son Jesus, are sinful by nature, which would have made the sacrifice unacceptable. Only God's Son was sinless, both before he came to earth and afterwards.

God's presence (all of them without knowledge of the Son), and he was still the fierce Prosecutor of Moses' law, and he still did not know that God saw him as evil. Nor did he know that God, through Jesus, would soon redeem mankind from sin.

In the Temptation, Satan was on a mission from God, and he did his duty in the wilderness with Jesus as diligently as he had always done his duty. God could have chosen any of His heavenly servants to tempt Jesus in the wilderness, but as always, He chose the one with the qualifications and disposition fitted to the task, and Satan was perfectly equipped for this one. He had the wisdom, the power, and the ambition fitting to the assignment.

All that Satan and the angels could have known was that God had sent him to earth on another important mission, this one dealing with the long-awaited Messiah. No human knew even that much. While Jesus was being tempted, everyone on earth went about life as usual in fields and in towns, unaware of the extraordinary event taking place in the Judean wilderness. Yet, the Temptation was a monumental event in salvation history, one deserving close examination, not merely to show its importance but to dispel wrong ideas about it.

The Bible offers no evidence that anyone on earth knew that the wilderness Temptation took place until after the life of God was shared with men on the day of Pentecost. More significantly, however, *not an iota of scriptural evidence suggests that anyone in heaven, including Satan, knew that God's purpose for sending Satan to earth was to tempt Jesus.* God did not reveal His purposes to Satan. He revealed them to those He blessed with His kind of life. It is a tribute to God's fathomless wisdom that Satan thought he was tempting Job when he was not and that he did not know he was tempting Jesus when he did.

When God sent Satan from heaven to the Judean wilderness, Satan could only have known what God told him about his mission. And God would not have explained to Satan that he was sending him to earth to meet with a new kind of man or that through that new man, a new and eternal covenant would be established. To explain those things, God would have had to reveal the existence of His Son, and it was not God's time for that yet. Satan and the angels knew more about spiritual things than humans knew because humans were created "a little lower" than they (Ps. 8:5; Heb. 2:7),⁷² but they did not know the Son of God, who was created a little lower than no one except the Father who created him. Only if we keep in mind the universal spiritual darkness of the time can we see Jesus' Temptation as the astonishing event that it was. Otherwise, the Temptation is reduced in our minds to nothing but an attack on the good guy, Jesus, by the bad guy, Satan. But it was not an attack at all.

DESIGNED BY GOD

Satan did not trick God's Son into going into the wilderness. Nor did he ambush him once he was there. Instead, "Jesus was led up into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tested by the Accuser" (Mt. 4:1; cp. Lk. 4:1–2). Or as Mark, in typical blunt fashion, said it, "The Spirit drove him out into the wilderness" (Mk. 1:12). But God not only sent His Son to meet Satan in the wilderness; He also sent Satan to meet His Son. God was in command of them both. They both were servants of God. Both had come down from heaven, and both were sent into the

⁷² Psalm 8:5 literally says that man was created "a little lower than the gods". I assume that "the gods" refers to all the heavenly beings God created, not just angels, including Satan, the "anointed cherub".

wilderness. Each one was obeying the command of God, but only one of them was good. The other was cursed and did not know it, and he could not know it because he did not have God's kind of life.

God determined everything about the Temptation, including when it would take place. When Mary's son came to the Jordan to be baptized by John, he was about thirty years old (Lk. 3:23), and at no time during those thirty years had God sent Jesus anywhere to meet with Satan, and with good reason. If Mary's son had gone out to meet Satan in the wilderness before God's Son came into his temple, he would have been overcome, for human nature is powerless to resist such mighty temptations, and a human nature is all that Mary's son had. The Temptation took place when it did because the Temptation was for *God's* Son, not Mary's, and God's Son had just arrived on earth. Moreover, the Temptation took place immediately after God's Son came to earth because the first order of business for the Son, once he was here, was to "bring into subjection" the body of flesh in which he now dwelt. With the Temptation, the Father was providing the Son the perfect opportunity to become absolute master over his newly acquired body of flesh.

Nothing bad was happening to God's Son in the Temptation! God is good, and His purposes are "holy, and just, and good", regardless of whom He uses to accomplish them. As Preacher Clark often pointed out, God used both righteous Moses and wicked Pharaoh to get the Israelites out of Egypt, one to pull and the other to push. God chose that particular Pharaoh and raised him up to accomplish His good purpose (Ex. 9:16), and Pharaoh's wickedness did not make God's purpose bad. Likewise, the fact that God used wicked Satan to tempt holy Jesus does not mean that something evil was taking place. When did God ever use Satan for an evil purpose? On the contrary, Jesus' Temptation was a holy event designed by God for His Son, who at that time was the only creature in a fleshly body who had the kind of life that could overcome it.

Again, I am not saying that Satan was not evil. He most certainly was, and still is. I am merely saying that at that time, he had not yet been exposed as evil, that he was still doing God service, and that he did not understand God's hidden purpose for sending him to meet Jesus in the wilderness. When Satan saw Jesus walking out into the wilderness, all he saw was the man who had come from Nazareth to be baptized by John. Satan met him in the wilderness. He spoke with him. He even picked Jesus up and carried him places (to the pinnacle of the temple and onto a high mountain), but Satan did not know this new man because, first of all, he was ignorant of the Son of God, and secondly, he could not see past the flesh, where the Son now dwelt. *When Satan looked into Jesus' eyes in the wilderness, he had no idea who was now looking back at him.* Seeing nobody but Mary's son, he thought he was dealing with nobody but Mary's son. Satan was confident he knew God and His truth, but he was never farther from the truth than that day in the wilderness when he was looking at Truth himself, in the face of Jesus Christ.

"ALL THAT IS IN THE WORLD"

If Satan had known the Son, he could not possibly have said and done what he did to him in the wilderness, for had he known the Son, he would have known that the Son was the one through whom God "made the worlds" (Heb. 1:2). And if Satan had known that, he would not have been so foolish as to make any suggestions to the Son, much less offer to make him ruler

over one of the worlds that he had created. That would have been like trying to bribe the owner of a lumberyard by offering him a toothpick. And it is most certain that if Satan had known that he was talking to the one through whom God created everything, “things in the heavens and things on earth, things visible and things invisible” (Col. 1:16), then Satan could not have tried to get him to bow at his feet. The Temptation would not have taken place if Satan had known with whom he was dealing. Satan was being used by God, as God had used him throughout history. He was still God’s servant, speaking only what God had given him to speak, and what God gave Satan to say during the Temptation was supremely wise. It could only have come from God.

Matthew and Luke give us details of the Temptation, and they agree that Satan suggested two things to Jesus and that he made one unheard-of offer. Here is Matthew’s version:

Matthew 4 (Lk. 4:3–13)

3. When the Tempter came to him, he said, “Since you are a son of God, command these stones to be turned into bread.”
4. But he answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”
5. Then the Accuser carried him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple,
6. and he said to him, “Since you are a son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning you, and they will bear you up with *their* hands, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”
7. Jesus said to him, “It is also written, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’”
8. Again, the Accuser carried him up onto a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory,
9. and he said to him, “All these things will I give you if you fall down and worship me.”
10. Jesus said to him, “Get behind me, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only shall you serve.’”
11. Then the Accuser left him, and immediately, angels came and ministered to him.

If any trial could have overwhelmed God’s Son, the wilderness Temptation would have, for it appealed in an unprecedented manner to the three basic components of human nature, the nature of the flesh which now covered – but did not control – the Son. John told us what these three components are:

1John 2

16. All that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world.

This is every man’s “world”, and every sin that man has ever committed falls into one of these three categories. If the Son of God, now the man Jesus Christ, would subdue the nature of his flesh – even though God had sent a heavenly messenger to suggest that he yield to it – then

the Son would have overcome “the world”. But at the time of the Temptation, Satan certainly did not understand this. Only God did.⁷³

In the garden of Eden, Eve gave in to the same three elements of human nature with which Satan confronted Jesus:⁷⁴

Genesis 3

6. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food [desire of the flesh], and that *it was* a delight to the eyes [desire of the eyes], and a tree to be desired to make one wise⁷⁵ [pride of life], she took some of its fruit, and ate *it*. Then, she also gave *some* to her husband with her, and he ate.

The Serpent deceived Eve in the garden of Eden, but in the wilderness, Satan was not dealing with Eve. He was dealing with the Son of God.

THE WORLD THAT JESUS CONQUERED, PART 1
“*The Desire of the Flesh*”

In the Temptation, the righteousness of God that had been hidden since the foundation of the world was given visible expression by the Son. That new kind of righteousness would have seemed strange to Satan, and after Jesus left the wilderness and began preaching, that kind of righteousness seemed so strange to people that many of them concluded that Jesus was cursed by God (Isa. 53:4).

On the other hand, in spite of how obvious it may be to us on this side of Pentecost, no one in heaven or on earth would have seen any unrighteousness in what Satan said or did during the Temptation. After all, the Almighty sent Satan to do what he did; so, how could anyone have thought that Satan was doing evil? On the contrary, under the circumstances, Satan and everyone else would have considered it sinful for him *not* to do it! But even without knowing that God sent him, no one would have seen evil in what Satan said and did.

Firstly, where was the evil in encouraging Jesus to eat if he was hungry? In a deserted place, with a man who had the power to do so, even righteous people would have thought it was a good idea for Jesus to make himself some food from the material at hand: stones. Both Satan and Jesus knew that God told the Israelites that they were free to eat what they wanted to eat when they were hungry (Dt. 12:15). Besides that, anyone might have thought, *What kind of God would want the Messiah to starve?*

⁷³ It is possible, of course, that the Son also understood this. At the same time, the Son went through a learning process after taking on a human body (Jn. 5:20; Heb. 5:8), and we are not told when the Son learned what.

⁷⁴ The Bible never explicitly states that Satan is the one who seduced Eve. Therefore, we are left to deduce from information found in both the Old and New Testaments, that Satan was, in fact, the serpent in the garden of Eden. Some examples of this information are the following: John called Satan “the ancient serpent” (Rev. 12:9; 20:2), Ezekiel said that Satan had “been in Eden, the garden of God” (Ezek. 28:13), and Paul compared the seduction of Eve to Satan’s deceptive work among the saints (2Cor. 11:3).

⁷⁵ The Hebrew word translated here as “wise” implies a worldly kind of wisdom. It could also be translated, “successful”. Satan thought that the wisdom to be successful in this world was God’s kind of wisdom and that those who possessed it, as he did (Ezek. 27), were like God. That is what tempted Eve. Satan thought that he himself was like God, and he expected the worldly wisdom he had to bring him great heavenly success in the future (Isa. 14:13-14).

What Satan did not know was that the Son was humbly waiting for his Father's "still, small voice" to let him know it was time to eat. It is God's kind of righteousness to be led by the Spirit. That is why the Son refused to be led by his flesh's craving for food or by Satan's suggestion that he do so. And in choosing his Father's will concerning food, even after weeks without eating, the Son overcame the part of the Temptation dealing with "the desire of the flesh".

THE WORLD THAT JESUS CONQUERED, PART 2
"The Pride of Life"

Those at that time who loved God and Jesus would have thought that Satan's next suggestion was an especially good one. Only those who hated Jesus would have disapproved of it, for Satan told Jesus how he might prove to men that he was the Messiah. Satan suggested to Jesus that he hurl himself from the pinnacle of the temple so that God's people would see him miraculously escape harm, and thus win their hearts. Satan reminded Jesus of God's promise to appoint angels to watch over him and to hold him up if he so much as tripped (Ps. 91:12), and if the angels would catch Jesus if he tripped, they would certainly catch him if he was falling from a tall building. Such a public, miraculous escape from death would certainly convince the Jews that Jesus was their Messiah, Satan thought, and that would be a good thing – would it not? But the Spirit within Jesus would not yield to his flesh's desire for recognition or to Satan's suggestion that he seek it. Jesus chose again to wait for his Father's direction, this time concerning when and how to make himself known. That is the righteousness of God in action. It chooses the will of God over all things of earth, even those that are most desirable to the flesh.⁷⁶

The third element of the world that Jesus conquered during the Temptation, "the desire of the eyes", will be examined in detail shortly. Before that, we must consider what was happening inside Jesus during his Temptation.

A NEW KIND OF WARFARE

Satan was no challenge for Jesus; but then, *Satan did not come to the wilderness to be a challenge to Jesus*. Contrary to how the Temptation is usually depicted, there was no contest, no battle in the wilderness between Jesus and Satan, and neither of them looked at their meeting that way. By God's design, and unknown to Satan, the battle was entirely within Jesus himself. It was the battle Paul described as the flesh desiring what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit desiring what is contrary to the flesh (Gal. 5:17). According to Jesus, all of man's sins come from the human heart (Mk. 7:18–23). James agreed, saying that if anyone goes astray, it is only that he has been drawn away by his own lust (Jas. 1:14). A man can sit in his chair at home and overcome the world, or he can sit in his chair and commit every sin that exists. Both righteousness and wickedness are altogether matters of the heart, and Jesus labored to communicate that truth:

Matthew 5

27. You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery,"

⁷⁶ Jesus faced a similar temptation while on the cross. There, everything in his flesh was screaming for relief from the awful pain when the chief priests, scribes, and elders (Satan's sons) promised to believe in him if he would do the miraculous and come down from the cross (Mt. 27:41–42; Mk. 15:31–32).

28. but I say to you that every man who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

God's purpose for His Son was not that he overcome Satan or anything else outside his body, but that he overcome the "world" of his sinful human nature. Nothing outside of the Son's fleshly body was ever a challenge for him. Nor is anything outside of our bodies a challenge for us.⁷⁷ As with Jesus, if we walk in the way of God's righteousness, then we have won the battle with our flesh and have overcome our world. A man who brings himself to perfect submission to the will of God is master of his world. Jesus did this first, and he did it in the wilderness by choosing to be "led by the Spirit" instead of by his flesh. This can hardly be overemphasized: *Jesus was our example because he overcame the world by the same means that he made available to us – the life of God.*

If Jesus overcame the world because he had access to power which is not available to us; that is, if Jesus overcame the world by virtue of *who* he was rather than by the power of the life God gave him, then he is no example for anybody.⁷⁸ But if he overcame the world because he was filled with God's kind of life and walked in that life,⁷⁹ then when Jesus made God's life available to us, he gave us the same power to overcome the world that his Father had given him. Paul strongly emphasized the need and the benefit of walking in the strength of God's kind of life:

Galatians 5

16. Now I say, walk in *the* Spirit and you will not carry out fleshly desire.

Romans 8

2. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

When Jesus overcame his flesh, he had overcome "all that is in the world" – the desire of his flesh, the desire of his eyes, and the pride of his newly acquired human body. Several years later, when Jesus told his disciples that he had overcome the world (Jn. 16:33b), this was the world he was talking about. Moreover, in Revelation, he warned all seven of the pastors to whom he spoke that the promises of God await only those who overcome the world as he did (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26–28; 3:5, 12, 21).

In his wilderness trial, the Son of God was "tempted in every way that we are," and yet, he did not sin (Heb. 4:15). He exited the wilderness as conqueror of the whole world because he had mastered himself. He had won the battle between his holy nature and the nature of the body

⁷⁷ Paul did not contradict this when he said that we struggle "not against flesh and blood, but against authorities, against powers, against the dark world-rulers of this age, against evil spirits among heavenly beings" (Eph. 6:12). What Paul meant was that our enemy is not human ("flesh and blood"); rather, it is the power of unclean spirits that appeal to the desires of our flesh, as Satan appealed to Jesus' fleshly desires in the wilderness.

⁷⁸ That is, if he overcame the world because he is the Father himself (Oneness) or because he was part of a triune God (Trinitarianism), he is no example for any human.

⁷⁹ Mary's son was an exceptionally good child and young man (Lk. 2:40–52), but whether he was sinless or not prior to God's Son blending with him at the Jordan River is irrelevant. Whatever sins are on a person's record before he is born again are washed away when he receives God's life, for by that experience, he becomes a new person, perfectly pure and blameless before God.

in which he now lived. Jesus Christ was the first person ever to engage in this new kind of warfare, the warfare of the flesh against the Spirit within it, and he won the battle by following the Spirit. Once he had done that, he “returned in the power of the Spirit” to begin his work of redeeming mankind (Lk. 4:14).

Paul called the nature of our flesh the “old man” (Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22), and he warned us that our “old man” cannot please God (Rom. 8:7–8). He also exhorted us to “put on the new man, who in God’s likeness is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24). Only death completely ends this warfare between the old man and the new man, for the flesh can never be other than what it is, but we can win the daily battle. One old preacher told me that the problem with most of God’s people is that they don’t kill the old man; they just drink enough of the Spirit to make him sick. Those who are established in the faith, however, obey Paul’s exhortation to crucify the old man and then let him die, every day (1Cor. 15:31; Gal. 2:19–20). And Paul explained why it is essential that we do that:

Romans 8

13. If you [believers] live after the flesh, you shall die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you shall live.

We cannot escape the dominion of our sinful nature except by partaking of God’s nature and walking in His righteousness. The Son of God came from heaven to make that possible for us. What a precious opportunity is ours in Christ, to overcome the world as he did; that is, to have within us the power to subdue our nature and to walk with God and His Son in the newness of God’s kind of life (Rom. 6:4).

The World that Jesus Conquered, Part 3

“The Desire of the Eyes”

To complete the mission on which God had sent him, Satan made an offer to Jesus that appealed powerfully to this last of the three components of human nature. He took Jesus to a very high mountain, showed him the spectacular glories of the world’s kingdoms, and then offered it all to him. And again, we should ask, where was the evil in offering to make Jesus ruler of the world? Had not the prophets repeatedly proclaimed that God would give the Messiah rule over the nations (Ps. 72:11; Isa. 2:2; Jer. 3:17)?⁸⁰ At one point during Jesus’ ministry, a multitude in Galilee decided to take Jesus by force and make him king (Jn. 6:14–15). And after the resurrection, but before Jesus’ ascension back to heaven, the disciples were expecting him to lead a rebellion against their Roman overlords and restore Israel’s past glory (Acts 1:6). They all, disciples and multitude, would have deemed Satan’s offer to be an exceptionally good one, sent from God. They would not have been able to conceive of a reason for Jesus to refuse Satan’s amazing offer. But Jesus did, for he was being led by his Father’s Spirit, and the Spirit was not leading him that way.

An important but little considered factor in the Temptation is that if what Jesus was tempted with was not real, then there was no real Temptation. Jesus really could have turned stones into food, the angels really would have rescued him if he had thrown himself off the pinnacle of the

⁸⁰ Those prophets also foretold that the Messiah would rule very harshly (Ps. 2:8–9; cp. Rev. 19:11–15) – just the sort of ruler that would suit Satan.

temple, and Satan really could have given Jesus authority over all the kingdoms of earth. An understanding of Satan's offer to make Jesus King of the world, and Jesus' refusal of that offer, is critical to a right perspective of Jesus' ministry, suffering, and resurrection, for this element of the Temptation sets the stage for almost everything that followed in the gospel story.

Princes over the Nations

Once, Daniel prayed and sought God three weeks before he received his answer. When his answer came, it came by the hand of a resplendent heavenly being. This messenger told Daniel that when Daniel had first begun praying, his prayer had been heard. Then he said that a spirit, which he identified as "the prince of the kingdom of Persia", had delayed his arrival,⁸¹ adding that he was able to complete his journey only because the archangel Michael had come to his aid. This is the Bible's first mention of Michael, and it revealed to Daniel, and to us, that Michael is "one of the chief princes" among the angels. Here is the story:

Daniel 10

2. In those days, I, Daniel, was mourning for three full weeks.
3. I ate no delicacies, nor did flesh or wine come into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all until three full weeks were completed.
4. And on the twenty-fourth day of the first month, I was on the bank of the great river, that is, the Hiddekel.
5. And I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, and whose waist was girded with gold of Uphaz.
6. His body was like jasper, and his face looked like lightning, and his eyes, like flaming torches, and his arms and feet were like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words was like the sound of a multitude.
- ...
12. Then he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. From the first day you set your heart to understand and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard. And I have come because of your words.
13. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia."⁸²

We all know that the nations of earth have governments, but the government of the nations includes more than meets the eye. There are invisible powers over the nations as well as powers that we can see, as this episode from the book of Daniel shows.

No human prince could have delayed a divine messenger from coming to Daniel for three weeks as did the "prince of the kingdom of Persia". That prince was a spiritual being who had authority over the Persian Empire, including the authority, which he obviously used in the case

⁸¹ The fact that the "prince of Persia" opposed Daniel's visitor did not reveal to anyone that this prince was evil. Jacob wrestled with an angel all night to prevent the angel from going where he wanted to go (Gen. 32:24-29), but no one considered Jacob evil for doing so.

⁸² Note that while there was only one spiritual prince over Persia, there were a number of human kings.

of Daniel's visitor, to refuse admission into his realm, where Daniel was. Later in Daniel 10, the messenger informed Daniel that he was leaving to do battle again with the prince of Persia, perhaps in an effort to escape that prince's territory in order to return to his place. Finally, he informed Daniel that after he was gone, "the prince of Greece" would come (Dan. 10:20b) and that Michael was the prince ordained to be over the Jewish nation: "Nevertheless, I will tell you what is inscribed in the Book of Truth. But there is not one who stands with me against these princes⁸³ except Michael your prince" (Dan. 10:21).

Levels of Authority

In the Temptation, Jesus did not dispute Satan's claim to have authority over the nations. He knew that Satan is the god of this world. Three times, Jesus referred to Satan as ruler of the world, not merely the prince of one nation (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). He also said that Satan has angels under him (Mt. 25:41), which would make those angels "the authorities, powers, and dark world-rulers" Paul mentioned in Ephesians 6:12. Under Satan, those angels would, in turn, have lesser angels under them, ruling over smaller areas, such as regions, states, counties, and towns. Jesus described this invisible government under Satan as well-organized (Mt. 12:25–26).⁸⁴

There are levels of authority among both angels and men, and even among animal groups. Among men, for example, there are dukes and bishops, and then there are archdukes and archbishops who rule over them. Similarly, there are angels, and then there are archangels. Moreover, rulers among a higher group of beings have the power to rule over those in a lower group. Archangels, for example, rule over humans as well as other angels, and humans rule over animals as well as other humans. It is never the other way around. Even the highest of animals do not rule over the lowest of men, and even the highest of humans do not rule over the lowest of angels.

Angels "govern" human kingdoms through the influence of their spirits. Influence is a reality in every sphere of existence, and the influence of a powerful spiritual being who has authority over a certain region of the earth is significant and pervasive in that region. We all know by experience that our behavior is influenced, either for good and for evil, by the spirits around us. Those spirits may be human or otherwise. That is one reason Solomon warned his son that, "He who walks with wise men becomes wise, but a companion of fools shall suffer harm" (Prov. 13:20). It is the same with nations. The character of a particular ruling angel influences the portion of earth over which he rules.

Michael Stands Alone in Satan's Realm

The heavenly visitor's comment to Daniel that none of the spiritual princes of the nations were standing for the truth except Michael, the prince of Israel, makes biblical sense. Israel has always stood alone in a world of Gentiles, and Michael stands alone in a realm of "dark world-rulers of this age, and evil spirits among heavenly beings" (Eph. 6:12). At the close of this age, all the spiritual princes of earth will unite their nations behind Satan's greatest servant in history

⁸³ Or "in these things".

⁸⁴ Conflicts arise among the nations within Satan's well-organized kingdom because mankind is naturally rebellious and self-willed. Humans do not by nature submit to any authority, be it good or evil.

in order to destroy Michael's nation (Zech. 14:2; Rev. 16:13–16). An angel also told Daniel that in those last-day events, Michael will play a major role, acting as “the great prince who stands up for the children of your people” (Dan. 12:1).

Michael was at constant odds with Satan, the god of this world under whom Michael served. Every other spiritual prince followed Satan's lead, many of them princes over nations far larger and more powerful than Michael's tiny Israel. Nevertheless, Michael stood firm, and still stands for what is right, alone among all the world's spiritual princes. No doubt, Satan hated him for it, and all the more so after God gave Michael and his angels a key role in casting Satan and his angels out of heaven after the Son ascended:

Revelation 12

7. And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels warring against the dragon, and the dragon waging war, and his angels.
8. But *the dragon* did not prevail, neither was there place found for him in heaven any longer.
9. And the great dragon was also cast *out*, the ancient serpent, who is called the Accuser, and Satan, who deceives the entire world. He was thrown *down* to the earth, and his angels were thrown *down* with him.

In this covenant, Michael still occupies his position as Israel's prince, just as Satan still occupies his position as god of this world. The fact that Michael is one of the archangels ruling the nations under Satan should not cause us a theological problem. For Michael to operate within Satan's realm does not pollute Michael any more than it pollutes God's children to submit to human rulers, as the apostles exhorted them to do, and they are holier creatures than Michael. Peter gave the following exhortation to the saints, who, being God's own sons and daughters, are far superior to those who rule over them in this world:

1Peter 2

13. Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king, as supreme,
14. or to governors, as those sent by him for the punishment of those who do evil and for the praise of those who do good.
- ...
17. Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.
18. Servants, be subject to *your* masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust.

Every righteous man and woman in history has submitted to the earthly authorities that were over them in this world. Daniel and his three friends refused to obey the king only on the rare occasions when the king's commandment contradicted God's. They always obeyed the “higher power”, and God was highest of all. The stories about those occasions when they could not obey the king make for wonderful Bible stories, but we must understand that Daniel and his friends did not live as rebels against the king; at all other times, they willingly bowed before him and obeyed his every command. Even Jesus, while in the flesh, acknowledged and submitted to wicked Pilate's God-given authority over him on this earth:

John 19

9. [Pilate] returned into the Praetorium again and said to Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus did not give him an answer.
10. Therefore, Pilate said to him, “You do not speak to me? Do you not understand that I have authority to crucify you, and I have authority to release you?”
11. Jesus answered, “You have no authority over me at all, other than what has been given to you from above. This is why the man who turned me over to you has the greater sin.”

Jesus submitted to earthly powers who were under Satan because he understood that Satan’s power was given to him by God. Therefore, he submitted to Pilate and to Satan as ministers of God. Paul was adamant that the saints follow Jesus’ example and submit to earthly rulers, and he warned them that rebellion against worldly authorities could cost them their souls:

Romans 13

1. Let every soul be subject to the higher powers, for there is no power but of God; the powers that exist are ordained by God.
2. Therefore, he who opposes the power is resisting the ordinance of God, and they who resist shall receive to themselves damnation.
- ...
4. For he is the minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is a minister of God, an avenger to execute wrath upon the one who does evil.
5. Wherefore, it is necessary to be subject, not just because of wrath, but also for conscience sake.

Please notice what Paul tells the saints about earthly political powers:

- Earthly rulers are “higher” than God’s people, as far as earthly authority is concerned.
- Earthly powers are ordained by God to rule over the earth.
- Whoever opposes the power that God has ordained opposes God’s ordinance, and will be damned.
- Because the earthly powers, both visible and invisible, are ordained by God, they are ministers of God.
- They are ordained as ministers of God for the good of God’s people.
- They are ordained as ministers of God to execute God’s wrath on evildoers.
- One cannot have a clear conscience without submitting to the earthly powers ordained by God.

Being a ruler of this earth does not make one holy, nor does it mean that the ruler belongs to God in the sense of belonging to His family. But it does mean that he is God’s minister, God’s servant, to fulfill God’s will on earth, for Paul clearly says no ruling power exists except that which God has raised up. The fact that earthly rulers are sometimes very wicked does not mean that God did not ordain them to be rulers, as is seen in His words to Pharaoh, the wicked ruler of

Egypt: “For this purpose have I raised you up, to make you see my power, and so that my name is declared in all the earth” (Ex. 9:16).

As long as we are in this world, and as long as Satan is the god of it, we are to submit to his legitimate authority. Satan and the world-rulers under him are in their place only because God put them there, and rebellion against God’s order is sin. Paul plainly warned us that “for conscience sake”, we must submit to the authorities who rule the earth because God has raised them up. It is impossible to have fellowship with God and Christ if we do not acknowledge Satan’s God-given authority and submit to it as long as (1) we live in this world over which he reigns and (2) those who rule the earth under him do not command us to disobey God (Acts 4:19). For example, when the Sanhedrin commanded the apostles to preach no more in Jesus’ name, Peter humbly and boldly replied, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29; 4:18–19).⁸⁵

Saints in this covenant are not to meddle in Satan’s business. They are not to “entangle” themselves in earthly political affairs or military conflicts.⁸⁶ All such worldly matters are in Satan’s hands, and they were put into his hands by God. To make this perfectly clear, we need only to add the name of the god of this world to the previously read scriptures from Romans:

Romans 13

1. Let every soul [on earth] be subject to the higher powers [under Satan], for there is no power but of God; the powers [under Satan] that exist are ordained by God.
2. Therefore, he who opposes the [earthly] power [of Satan] is resisting the ordinance of God, and they who resist will receive to themselves damnation.
...
4. For he [Satan] is the minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is a minister of God, an avenger to execute wrath upon the one who does evil.
5. Wherefore, it is necessary to be subject [to the earthly authority of Satan], not just because of wrath, but also for conscience sake.

Neither Jesus nor the apostles gave instructions to believers on how to exercise political power because the body of Christ is not an earthly nation. Wise believers’ refusal to involve themselves in social movements or to become embroiled in political and military conflicts is one reason they have always been misunderstood and persecuted. All such activity is carnal; it is “in the flesh”, and it belongs not to the kingdom of God but to the world over which Satan is god.

Paul exhorted the saints to pray for the earthly authorities (1Tim. 2:1–2) because he knew that those authorities were ordained of God. Likewise, Michael knew, and still knows, that God ordained Satan to be the god of this world and to rule over the spiritual princes of the nations. And because God has not changed that order, Michael still conducts his business for Israel under

⁸⁵ The leaders of Israel held secular as well as religious power (e.g., Ex. 21:5–6, 15–17). Jesus acknowledged their worldly authority, just as he did Satan’s, and he told his disciples to obey them (Mt. 23:1–3). The fact that Israel’s rulers wielded worldly authority may be one reason Jesus called them Satan’s sons.

⁸⁶ As Paul said it, no wise child of God “entangles himself in the affairs of this life” (2Tim. 2:4).

Satan's authority, just as wise saints conduct their worldly business under the authorities that God has established over them, obedient to them in all things – up to the point that their commands contradict the expressed will of God.

THE WORLD THAT JESUS *WILL* CONQUER

It is the privilege of the nation of God's saints to be out from under the rule of any of Satan's angels. Those who are born of God are born as citizens of a heavenly country and are free to live according to "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus", not according to the spirit that controls their part of the earth. Jesus said that the children of God are free even from the obligation to pay taxes to earthly governments, although for the sake of others, it is good for them to do so:

Matthew 17

25. When *Peter* came into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, "Simon, what do you think? From whom do kings of the earth take customs or poll-tax? From their children or from strangers?"
26. Peter said to him, "From strangers." Jesus said to him, "Well then, the children are free.
27. But lest we be a stumbling block to them, go to the sea, cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up, and when you have opened its mouth, you will find a stater;⁸⁷ take that and give *it* to them for me and you."

We who are God's children, being citizens of a heavenly country, are not subject to earthly laws. However, we are subject to the law of God, who loves mankind and does not want us to be a stumbling block to them. Ours is a dangerous liberty. It is true that we are to "stand fast" in the extraordinary liberty we have in Christ (Gal. 5:1), but within that liberty, we must live in a way that causes others to speak well of our God (Mt. 5:16). If we do not walk uprightly or use our liberty for good, we can provoke people to speak evil of God (Rom. 2:24; 2Sam. 12:14). Paul gave this exhortation to the Galatian saints:

Galatians 5

13. You were called to liberty, brothers, only *do not use* that liberty as a pretext for the flesh; instead, through love, live as slaves to one another.
14. For the entire law is summed up in one statement; namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Paul cared nothing for liberty if by misusing it, he damaged souls. He saw himself as liberated from sin so that he might humble himself to love others as Christ did. He warned the saints in Corinth,

1Corinthians 8

9. Beware, lest this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to the weak.
10. For if someone should see you who has knowledge eating in the temple of an idol, will not the conscience of that weak one be emboldened to eat things offered to idols?

⁸⁷ A *stater* was exactly enough to pay the temple tax for both Jesus and Peter.

11. Then, will *not* the weak brother, for whom Christ died, be destroyed by your knowledge?
12. In sinning thus against the brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

For God's children, "the man, Jesus Christ" is the only mediator between them and God (1Tim. 2:5), but the nations of earth are still under the power of Satan and his angels, and people of this earth have no option, short of starting a revolution, but to obey them. However, God "has delivered us from the domain of darkness and translated *us* into the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col. 1:13). God's children are already "kings and priests" of God (Rev. 5:10), but the world does not recognize them as such. Only when Jesus returns will the children of God be made manifest as kings and priests because they will openly reign over the earth with Jesus (Rev. 20:4). Paul told the saints in Corinth that when Christ returns, the saints of God would be given authority, each according to his ability (Lk. 19:12–26), to judge both the world and angels (1Cor. 6:2–3). I suppose that men like Paul, Daniel, and Job will be given king-like authority over large portions of the earth. But all of God's children are "heirs together with Christ" (Rom. 8:17), and the angels are their servants (Heb. 1:14).

After the thousand-year reign, God will destroy this heaven and earth (Isa. 65:17; Rev. 21:1), and He will provide for His children "new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness dwells" (2Pet. 3:13). On that happy new earth, there will be a government of saints reigning over other saints (Rev. 21:24), just as some saints rule over other saints now in the body of Christ (Heb. 13:7, 17, 24). May God grant us the grace to grow in the knowledge of God so that we might be found worthy to reign with Christ when that day comes!

But for now, let's go back to the Temptation.

SATAN'S BIG CHANCE

What Satan offered Jesus was his position as god of this world, but that offer would have been made only at the command of God. Satan would never have done such a thing on his own. But what could Satan have thought God's purpose was for having him do that? To Satan's mind, the only reasonable explanation was that the time had at last come when God would promote him to the position he had desired for so long:

Isaiah 14

13. You have said in your heart, "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the Mountain of Assembly, on the far north side.
14. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High."

What other reason could there be, Satan must have thought, for God to send him to offer Jesus his position as god of this world except that Jesus, the Messiah, was to fill a position that would soon be vacant? Far from coming to earth to attack Jesus, Satan had come to elevate Jesus to the exalted position of god of this world in his stead, and he would have been pleased to do so *if Jesus' promotion meant an even greater promotion for him*. Satan was happy for God to exalt Jesus to take his place, so long as God exalted him to reign with God over all creation. In

that case, even if Satan had been antagonistic toward Jesus before the Temptation, thoughts of Jesus' promotion would have given him pleasure.

Blind to the Father's purpose, how proud Satan must have been to be playing a role in fulfilling the prophecies about the Messiah! How eager he must have been to see Jesus use his power to turn stones into bread and to leap to what men would think was certain death, but be miraculously rescued! Satan must have been excited to show Jesus the kingdoms of earth that he was about to turn over to him. And oh, the anticipation Satan must have felt as the moment drew near for Jesus to signify his acceptance of the position by kneeling before his new master! Satan had worked and waited a long time for this moment, and now, at last (he thought), the Dispensation of Satan was at hand!

Both God and Satan were eager to set in motion the events that were about to transpire, but for very different reasons – God, because He was about to reveal His beloved Son and to bestow upon him great glory, and Satan, because of the glory he thought God was about to bestow upon him. Satan was thrilled. God was patient.

THE ACT OF BOWING

Biblical examples of both righteous and unrighteous people bowing before someone other than God are numerous.⁸⁸ Bowing before rulers and bowing as a sign of respect were common cultural practices, acceptable to both God and men. So, the act of bowing before someone other than God was not in itself sinful. On the contrary, in many cases it was sinful not to bow.

Satan came to the wilderness as God's representative, not as a rebel. In suggesting that Jesus bow to him, Satan was not expecting Jesus to bow to him *instead of God* but to bow to him *under God* as an acknowledgment of Satan's new position in God's kingdom. In Satan's mind, the Messiah's stepping into the role of god of this world was the only thing lacking in God's plan to elevate Satan to reign with Him in glory, directly under God in the universal chain of command. If Jesus bowed, it would have meant that he accepted the position and acknowledged Satan as the higher authority.

Paul taught that the ancient scriptures were "written for our learning" (Rom. 15:4). The Old Testament, he said, provided "shadows" of New Testament events (Col. 2:16–17). One Old Testament shadow of Jesus' refusal to bow to Satan is found in the book of Esther. Esther's cousin and guardian, Mordecai, refused to bow before Haman, who was second only to the Persian king Ahasuerus (Esth. 3:1–5). Mordecai's reason for refusing to bow to Haman is not given in the book of Esther, but it was a good one. Mordecai refused to bow to Haman because he knew what God thought about Haman, and since Mordecai knew what God thought about Haman, Mordecai knew Haman better than Haman knew himself. Haman was an Amalekite (in

⁸⁸ Some examples: Abraham bowed before angels and before some Canaanites (Gen. 18:1–2; 23:7). Both the wicked prophet Balaam and righteous Joshua bowed before angels (Num. 22:31; Josh. 5:14). Jacob and his family bowed before Esau (Gen. 33:1–7). Ruth bowed before Boaz (Ruth 2:10). David bowed before both King Saul and Saul's son, Jonathan (1Sam. 20:41; 24:8). Mephibosheth (2Sam. 9:6–8), Joab (2Sam. 14:21–22), Absalom (2Sam. 14:33), Ahimaaz (2Sam. 18:28), and Araunah (2Sam. 24:20) bowed before David. Bathsheba bowed before her son Solomon, "and did reverence" (1Kgs. 1:16, 31), and Solomon showed respect to her by bowing to her (1Kgs. 2:19). Nathan, the great prophet, bowed to Solomon (1Kgs. 1:23), as did Solomon's traitorous brother, Adonijah (1Kgs. 1:53).

the book of Esther, called an Agagite⁸⁹), and Mordecai knew that God hated the Amalekites and had sworn that He would fight against them in every generation until He destroyed them (Ex. 17:14–16).⁹⁰

It so provoked Haman that Mordecai would not bow to him that he determined not just to kill Mordecai but to rid the earth of Mordecai's whole race, the Jews:

Esther 3

5. And when Haman saw that Mordecai was not bowing or doing him obeisance, Haman was filled with wrath.
6. But it was not enough in his eyes to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had denounced Mordecai's people to him, and Haman set about to exterminate all the Jews, Mordecai's people, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.

For Mordecai, living as a captive in far away Persia, it required great faith to believe God's thousand-year-old promise to make perpetual war against the Amalekites. Yet, Mordecai had that kind of faith, and out of his faith sprang a righteous disregard for Haman that prevented Mordecai from bowing to that very powerful but very wicked man.

The reason for the meek Son of God refusal to bow before Satan is not given either, but it is the same reason Mordecai refused to bow before Haman; that is, the Son knew what God thought about Satan. The Son, like Mordecai, was far from his homeland, yet, also like Mordecai, he continued to have great faith in God. On the other hand, Satan, like Haman, was extremely provoked by Jesus not bowing to him, and he also, like Haman, determined to exterminate all the Jews.⁹¹

It was not a rebellious spirit that kept Jesus from bowing to Satan. Twice during the Temptation, the Son of God humbled himself to allow Satan to transport him out of the wilderness to other places, just as he would later humbly allow wicked men to abuse and crucify him. Every moment, in every situation, the Son's full attention was given to doing the will of God. Jesus refused to bow before Satan for the same reason he allowed Satan to carry him places; it was what God wanted him to do. The responses of Jesus to Satan in the Temptation calls to mind the faith of Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, who bowed before the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, in recognition of his God-given authority, but then refused to obey his command to bow to an idol that Nebuchadnezzar had erected (Dan. 3). Both in bowing to Nebuchadnezzar and then in refusing to bow, those three young men were doing the will of God.

God used humble, righteous people in the Old Testament as figures of His Son, without one of them understanding the holy nature of God that the Son would reveal. Jesus was the first to actually demonstrate God's humble, holy nature among men. He knew and obeyed God; therefore, he knew and obeyed the powers that God had ordained to be over him on this earth. Pilate, Satan, and Israel's priests and elders all had authority from God that Jesus recognized.

⁸⁹ Agag was a famous king of the Amalekites (1Sam. 15:8).

⁹⁰ The Amalekites were cruel and cowardly people. Every time Amalekites appear in a biblical story, they are seen abusing defenseless people (e.g., 1Sam. 30:11–13).

⁹¹ See Revelation 12:15–17, where the woman represents Israel.

Still, they should have been the ones bowing before God's Son, but none of them knew who it was who was standing before them.

WHEN DID THE SON KNOW?

Everything the Son is, the Father was, first. Everything he knows, the Father knew first. The Son freely admitted that he can *do* nothing without the Father (Jn. 5:19), and the concomitant to that is that the Son can *know* nothing without the Father. Everything the Son has ever taught was first taught to him by God (Jn. 8:28; 12:49). The Son confessed this through the prophet before he came to earth: "My Master, the LORD, has given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know *how* to help the weary with a word" (Isa. 50:4a).

The Father's education of His Son was an ongoing process while the Son was here on earth. Jesus said so: "The Father delights in the Son, and He is showing him everything that He is doing" (Jn. 5:20). The author of Hebrews also said that the Son was learning while he walked among us (Heb. 5:8). And, of course, it would have been the One greater than the Son, the *only* One greater than the Son, who was teaching him.

The Son truly knew God, Pilate, Satan, and everyone else, and that was true the entire time he walked among us. But we have seen that the Father conceals and reveals all truth and that until He reveals a thing, it remains unknown to everyone. So, the question is this: When did the Father reveal to the Son that the once perfect and upright Satan had become wicked? We know that the Son created Satan (Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:16) and that when he created Satan, he created him perfectly upright (Ezek. 28:15). But did the Father, *the Son's sole source of knowledge*, let the Son know about the change in Satan's heart when it first happened, or did He do so at some other point before He sent the Son down to earth? Could there have been a real temptation if the Son knew that Satan was wicked when he first met with him in the wilderness? Would the Son have cried out through David for Satan to avenge him of Judas (Ps. 109:6) if the Son had known in David's time that Satan was the one who would inspire Judas to betray him (Lk. 22:3–4)?

Admittedly, it is difficult to imagine the Son of God not knowing that Satan was wicked before he came to earth, but if the story of the Father and the Son teaches us anything, it teaches us that (1) our assumptions are often clouded by wrong ideas and that (2) no one in heaven or earth, including God's Son, knows anything until God reveals it.

It could certainly be that the Father revealed to the Son that Satan was wicked before He sent the Son to earth, and if He did, then in the Temptation, Jesus was following his Father's example of not letting Satan know how He saw him.⁹² Be that as it may, it is obvious from the preaching Jesus did after the Temptation that at that point he knew very well how wicked Satan was. Perhaps the Father revealed it to him during the Temptation itself, when Satan asked Jesus to bow before him. The Son would have known that no messenger sent from God to earth had ever *asked* those to whom he was sent to fall down and worship him. Men had fallen down, of course, when angels visited them (Num. 22:31; Josh. 5:14; Judg. 13:20). Ezekiel became so weak that he fell and could not stand back up, even when God told him to (Ezek. 1:28–2:2), and Daniel passed out completely when Gabriel started talking to him (Dan. 8:16–18). In none of

⁹² In that case, Psalm 109:6 would have been a prayer of the Son for any prosecutor, not just Satan. See the discussion in Chapter 6 under TARES IN HEAVEN: *Satan and the Hidden Son*.

these cases, however, did the angel ask men to bow. Those men fell down because they were overcome with fear at the angels' powerful presence. Even Balaam's donkey fell down when he saw an angel from the LORD (Num. 22:27). By way of contrast, the Son of God felt no fear at all in Satan's imposing presence. Terror would have seized any normal human being, but the Son of God was not merely human, and he has never feared or bowed to anyone except the Father, and never will.

Jesus used scriptures when he refused two of Satan's suggestions. However, when Satan asked him to bow down and worship him in addition to the Father, Jesus shot back a barbed, non-scriptural arrow from the quiver of the Spirit: "Get behind me, Satan!" (Lk. 4:8). Satan must have marveled at the sternness in the voice of Mary's son. As far as we know, no human had ever spoken to Satan at all, but even if someone had spoken to him, it was not like that.

Satan knew the scriptures well, and knowing that mankind had been created "a little lower than the angels" (Ps. 8:5), he saw the offer for Mary's son to be made king over the whole earth as generous and appropriate, since he was the Messiah. But the Son of God was not created "a little lower than the angels". On the contrary, he created the angels . . . and Satan. He was hidden now within a fleshly body instead of where he had been hidden before, but he was still the Son of God, and Satan still had no power over him whatsoever.

THE REPORT

Immediately after the Temptation, Satan departed from Jesus "for a while" (Lk. 4:13). When he left Jesus, he returned to heaven at some point, just as he returned to heaven after being sent to earth on other missions. When Satan returned from the wilderness to report to God, he must have felt the way the officers of the chief priests felt after they returned from their failed assignment to arrest Jesus. The priests who sent the officers asked why they had returned empty-handed, and the embarrassed officers could only respond, "Never has a man spoken like this man" (Jn. 7:46). Satan may have even reported to God, "This Messiah is hardheaded than Job!" We can only imagine what the conversation in heaven was like. Supremely confident of God's favor, Satan would have had no reason to hide his displeasure at Jesus not bowing to him. God, as usual, would have kept His thoughts to Himself. Satan, as usual, would have assumed that God felt as he did. Satan's report before the heavenly council would have contained the statement, "Jesus did not bow to me!" God's secret thought would have been, *You did not bow to my Son!*

But God was patient.

GOD AND SATAN AGREE: JESUS MUST DIE

Again in the story of Esther, the Persian king asked wicked Haman, "What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor?" (Esth. 6:6). Haman, assuming that he was the one in whom the king delighted, suggested several rare honors, which the king gladly and quickly bestowed – upon Mordecai! whom Haman hated *because Mordecai refused to bow to him*. On occasion, as we saw in Chapter 6 (1Kgs. 22:17–23), God would put forth such a question to His heavenly council, and it is easy to imagine God doing so to Satan. "What should be done to him who refuses to bow before the one I have chosen to reign with me?" Stern creature that he is, and assuming that he was the chosen one, Satan might have suggested great suffering for that

person and an eternal death of relentless, excruciating pain. If he did, God would have agreed to it, which would have filled Satan with greater pride than ever. He would not have known that God had determined before the world began that all who refused to bow to His Son would be eternally damned in a “Lake of Fire” (Rev. 20:10, 14–15).

In whatever way Satan’s report played out, at its end, all of heaven knew that God’s will was for Jesus to die. If anything, God would have been more insistent than Satan was that Jesus die, and afterward Satan would have congratulated himself that, once again, his thoughts and God’s were alike! Was there anyone else in all of creation so much like God as he, and so worthy to sit at God’s right hand? Since God had never revealed what He had really done to Job, Satan and others still thought that God had proved him right about Job. And as blessed as Job was by his painful experience, he died without understanding what God had really done with him. So, it was still a widely held belief that God would never put the righteous through suffering. Even John the Baptist, as great a man of God as he was, began to doubt, after he was thrown into prison, that Jesus was the Messiah (Mt. 11:2–3).

When God sent Satan back to earth to make sure Jesus died, Satan left heaven confident that it would please God for him to carry out the mission of killing the Messiah. God had, of course, planned from the beginning for His Son to die (Acts 4:27–28), but no one even knew that He had a Son, much less that God would send him to earth to suffer and die for sinners.

The prophets had spoken mysteriously about a righteous man who would suffer and die, and after God agreed that Jesus must die, Satan probably realized that those prophecies had been about Jesus. But he would have seen that truth through the prism of his own delusion, and he would have admired God again for having seen centuries ahead that the Messiah would have to die. Moreover, when God made it known to the heavenly council that the Messiah must die, would it not have seemed obvious to them that God did not love Jesus as much as He had loved Job? After all, God strictly commanded Satan *not* to kill Job.

God had it all under control. The Son’s death was not Satan’s plan. Satan would not have smitten God’s Messiah on his own initiative because he still entertained hopes of being exalted to God’s right hand. And God putting Satan in charge of killing the Messiah would have been seen by the angels as more evidence of the high regard in which the Almighty held that “anointed cherub”. It certainly would not have indicated to anyone in heaven that Satan was evil.

SECTION 3: THE SON’S MINISTRY

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with holy Spirit and power,
 who went about doing good
 and healing all who were oppressed by the Accuser,
 for God was with him.
 Acts 10:38

ACCOMPLICES

When Satan returned to earth after reporting to God on the Temptation, he found among God’s people many willing accomplices for his mission to get rid of Jesus. Satan knew that

Jesus was the Messiah, but many in Israel did not believe it, and their ignorance made them useful to him. Here are a few examples of what Satan found:

- The people in Jesus' hometown attempted to kill him the first time he spoke in the synagogue after returning from the wilderness (Lk. 4:16–30).
- Many considered Jesus to be demon-possessed (Jn. 10:20).
- Many considered Jesus to be cursed by God (Isa. 53:4).
- Many of Israel's leaders felt that Jesus should die (Mk. 3:6).
- Jesus' brothers did not believe in him (Jn. 7:5).
- Even Jesus' relatives, possibly including Mary, thought he was insane (Mk. 3:21, 31).

Israel's high priest was even moved by the holy Spirit to speak of the necessity of Jesus' death:

John 11

47. The chief priests and Pharisees, therefore, convened the Sanhedrin and said, "What are we to do? This man is working many miracles.
48. If we allow him such liberty, everyone will believe on him, and the Romans will come and carry away both our place and our nation."
49. Then one of them, Caiaphas, the high priest at that time, said to them, "You know nothing at all;
50. neither do you understand that it is better for us that one man should die for the people than that the whole nation perish."
51. But this he did not say of himself, but being high priest at that time, he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation.

Satan and the elders of Israel thought that the Spirit of God was decreeing through the high priest that Jesus must die in order to rescue the nation from destruction by the Romans. What God was actually decreeing was that Jesus had to die in order to rescue Israel and the rest of humanity from sin.

On the last night of Jesus' life on earth, it appeared that even the most devoted of Jesus' disciples gave up on him, for "they all forsook him, and fled" (Mk. 14:50). When the last of Jesus' friends forsook him, it must have seemed to Satan that virtually everybody in Israel had now come to agree with God and with him that Jesus must die. Over the course of Jesus' ministry, in Satan's view, Jesus had certainly given everyone ample reason to come to that conclusion, as we will show.

SUSPICIONS CONFIRMED

If Satan suspected that Jesus turned down his offer to be King of the world because Jesus coveted the high office that Satan expected to receive, then his suspicion would have been confirmed by statements Jesus made after he left the wilderness and began preaching. To begin with, Jesus openly condemned Satan as a murderer and the father of lies (Jn. 8:44). Such statements had never been made about Satan, and he considered what Jesus was saying about him to be slander. Satan could not have thought anything else. He did not even know that he was evil. How, then, could he think Jesus was right in speaking evil of him?

Jesus also declared these new things about Satan:

- Satan stole the word of God out of people’s hearts (Mk. 4:15).
- Satan preferred the things of men over the things of God (Mt. 16:23).
- There was an everlasting fire waiting for Satan and his angels (Mt. 25:41).
- Satan was the spiritual being that men called Beelzebub, the ruler over evil spirits (Mt. 12:24–26).
- Jesus had seen (in a vision) Satan fall like lightning from heaven (Lk. 10:18).

All those statements were true, but they were all new revelations, and Satan would not have believed any of them. After all, God, whom Satan had been serving for thousands of years, had never so much as hinted that He felt as Jesus did about him. But that was only because – and Satan did not know this – all wisdom and knowledge of God were hidden in the Son.

The Old Testament provides a shadow of Satan’s misguided suspicion of Jesus, in King Saul’s unfounded suspicion of innocent David:

1Samuel 18

6. And so it was that when David returned from slaying *Goliath* the Philistine, as they were coming, the women joyfully came out of all the cities of Israel to meet King Saul with tambourines and three-stringed instruments, singing and dancing.
7. And the women answered *one another* as they played, and they said, “Saul has slain his thousands, but David, his ten thousands.”
8. And Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him. And he said, “They ascribed ten thousands to David, but to me, they ascribed thousands! *What more can he have but the kingdom?*”
9. So, Saul eyed David from that day forward.

Before this, Saul had loved David and had promoted him to high office, but afterward, he came to hate David so much that he attempted to kill him several times (1Sam. 18:10–11; 19:9–10). This is how it appears to have been with Satan toward Jesus. At the time of the Temptation, he was eager to promote Jesus (because of what it would mean for himself), but when Jesus refused Satan’s offer to be god of this world, it would have been natural for Satan to think something like King Saul thought about David. *Does this man think that rule over the whole world is not enough honor for him? What more could he want but to sit in my seat beside God and rule with Him? He acts as if he’s the only son God has!*

So, from the moment Jesus turned down Satan’s offer to be god of this world, Satan eyed Jesus with the same kind of burning suspicion that King Saul felt toward David. And certain claims Jesus later made only added fuel to the fire. Jesus was innocent of any ungodly ambition, of course. Unlike Satan, who coveted glory, the Son of God “emptied himself” (Phip. 2:7). But the supremely proud Satan had no knowledge of Jesus’ kind of humility and could not understand that when Jesus spoke of his coming glory, his statements came from a humble, thankful heart. Here are a few provocative statements that Jesus humbly made:

- No one could come to the Father but by him (Jn. 14:6).

- All authority in heaven and on earth was given to him (Mt. 28:18). (Note that Jesus did not claim power over the earth only, which Satan had offered him, but power in heaven as well, which Satan wanted for himself.)
- He had the authority to forgive sins (Mk. 2:5–7). (Note that this claim was rejected by religious leaders whom Jesus called Satan’s sons, and being Satan’s sons, they would have been reflecting Satan’s attitude.)
- He and God were in perfect accord (Jn. 10:30; 17:22).
- He was greater than both the temple (Mt. 12:6) and the Sabbath (Lk. 6:5).

From the beginning of the world, men and angels had been moved by the Spirit of God to declare truth, but this was the first time in history that anyone had spoken the truth who understood what he was saying. *What a wonderful feeling it must have been for the Son, after being hidden for millennia, to be permitted to tell others of the Father he loved so much! How liberated he must have felt as he labored to liberate us from our spiritual darkness!* And yet, regardless of how plainly Jesus spoke the truth, as long as he walked among men in the flesh, he could not liberate anyone from spiritual darkness. Those who followed Jesus believed him as much as they could, but without God’s kind of life, they could not fully understand anything Jesus told them. Until the Spirit came, the only hope Jesus’ followers had was to keep trusting that whatever Jesus said was true. Some did that; many did not.

Once, a large group of disciples not only misunderstood Jesus, but also were so offended by the truth Jesus told them that they walked away, never to return. When Jesus, undeterred, asked his remaining disciples if they wanted to go with them (Jn. 6:66–67), Peter’s reply to Jesus, “to whom shall we go?” reveals something important about Peter and the other eleven disciples. Peter was as much in the dark about what Jesus was saying as were those who walked away, but Peter’s reply reveals that he felt that there was no one like Jesus and that he loved what he felt so much that he could not leave him. In other words, Peter was doing what many modern-day false teachers warn people never to do. He was “going by his feelings”. He could not have been “going by the Bible”. The disciples who left Jesus were doing that, for the Bible clearly forbade them to do what Jesus was telling them they must do in order to receive eternal life – drink blood (Lev. 7:26–27; 17:10–12)! Here is part of what they heard Jesus say:

John 6

53. Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life within you.
54. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up in the last day.”

“What sane man would teach such a doctrine?” the offended disciples would have asked. But they were not judging God’s truth. The truth of God was judging them. They could no longer stay with Jesus because their hearts were not clean enough to feel the goodness in Jesus’

words. It was not a test of the head but of the heart, and they failed the test. Consequently, on that day, the number of Satan's accomplices increased.⁹³

JESUS AND SATAN AGREED ON SOME THINGS

In spite of the many things Jesus said and did that provoked Satan, there was some common ground between them. They agreed that there was but one God and that He was omniscient, omnipotent, immortal, and good.⁹⁴ They also agreed that mankind was pathetically weak and ignorant. As we have seen, Jesus trusted no human confessions of faith (Jn. 2:23–25), not even those of his own disciples (Jn. 6:69–70; 16:29–32). And Satan's utter contempt for even the best of men was shown in his very low opinion of the "perfect and upright" Job. The significant difference between Jesus and Satan in regards to human beings was that Jesus loved them as he *knew* God did, while Satan held them in contempt as he *thought* God did.

Jesus and Satan clearly agreed that Satan was ruler of this world. They also agreed that Israel was God's chosen people, that through Israel the Messiah would come who was destined to rule the world (though their timelines differed for that event, obviously). They would also have agreed that Moses' law was holy and must be observed, though Jesus refused to hold in equal esteem the traditions of the elders that Satan's sons had developed during the preceding few centuries. They clearly agreed that the scriptures were true and that they foretold much about Jesus. When Satan quoted Psalm 91:11–12 during the Temptation and said they applied to Jesus, Jesus did not doubt that at all, but he, in turn, quoted a different scripture, one that was more in line with God's will for him at that moment (Mt. 4:7, quoting Dt. 6:16).

Satan would also have agreed with much that Jesus said about himself. Here are a few examples:

- Satan agreed with Jesus' claim that he was Israel's Messiah. He was not angered by that confession, as the priests and elders were (Mk. 14:61–64). He just wanted this Messiah to be satisfied with his part and not covet the position Satan thought was his. It must have puzzled Satan when, late in Jesus' ministry, Jesus said that one day he would sit on a throne, judging the nations (Mt. 25:31–32), since that is what Satan had offered him in the wilderness!
- Satan would have agreed with Jesus' claim that he was greater than Jonah (Mt. 12:41), Solomon (Mt. 12:42), and Abraham (Jn. 8:53–58).
- Satan would have agreed with Jesus' claim to be *a* son of God (Jn. 10:36), but when Jesus called himself "*the* Son of God" (Jn. 9:35; 11:4), Satan must have wondered what Jesus had in mind.

In Chapter 2, referring to the multitude that wanted to force Jesus to be their king, I made this statement: "If Jesus had yielded to those who wanted to make him king, or if he had accepted Peter's offer to rescue him from the cross, all mankind would have perished." The same may be

⁹³ Satan's accomplices in his mission to kill Jesus almost never included social outcasts such as harlots and drunkards. Common folk and social outcasts gladly heard Jesus (Mk. 12:37). Satan's most useful tools in that mission were religious men who knew how to maintain an appearance of sanctity.

⁹⁴ Their understanding of those qualities of God differed greatly, however. Jesus' definition of "good", for example, would not have been Satan's definition. So, in spirit there was no common ground between Jesus and Satan.

said of what Satan offered Jesus in the Temptation. If Jesus had accepted Satan's offer and settled for earthly power and glory, he could never have been the sacrifice for our sins, and we all would have perished. The reason that Jesus once spoke to Peter as if Peter himself were Satan (Mt. 16:23) is that Peter wanted the same thing for Jesus that Satan wanted; that is, for Jesus to become ruler of this world. In fact, all of Jesus' disciples felt the way Peter, the multitude, and Satan felt. But if Jesus had gone along with any of them, none of us would have any hope of salvation from the wrath of God. If the will of Satan and the people who loved Jesus had been done, they would have done as much damage to God's plan as would have Satan and the people who hated Jesus – had they been able to kill Jesus and keep him dead.

WHO WAS "LIGHT-BRINGER"?

The whole Roman world considered it honorable for a man to seek his own glory and to aspire to high position.⁹⁵ Satan thought the same way. Life without self-aggrandizement made no sense to most of the ancient world or to Satan. Satan would not have seen Jesus' refusal of the honor of being god of this world as an act of humility; on the contrary, Satan would have deduced from that refusal that Jesus was after even greater glory than that. It would have astonished Satan that a human, even an anointed one, would actually entertain the preposterous hope of sitting at the right hand of God. If Satan did not hate Jesus before the Temptation, he surely hated him afterward, not because he saw Jesus as a threat but because he saw him as proud and ambitious, unappreciative of the great honor that he and God had offered him. In other words, Satan, blind to his own wickedness, saw Jesus as having the kind of covetous, self-serving spirit that he actually had, competing with Satan for the same place in God's kingdom.

Although ordinary folk in Israel heard Jesus gladly (Mk. 12:37), Israel's leaders, the men Jesus called Satan's sons, hated Jesus because they, like Satan, thought he was competing with them for their high position among God's people (Jn. 12:19). Even Pontius Pilate discerned that Jesus was innocent and that Israel's elders wanted Jesus killed because they envied him and were working to secure their status among men (Jn. 18:38; Mt. 27:18).

We have already pointed out that we know Satan's expectation was to be exalted to reign with God over all creation because the Son has given us the knowledge of who Isaiah's "light-bringer" was. But consider how Satan must have read those scriptures after Jesus began preaching about bringing the light of God to mankind.

Isaiah 14

12. Oh, how you have fallen from heaven, O light-bringer, son of the dawn!
How you are cut down to the earth, O weakener of the nations!
13. You have said in your heart, "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the Mountain of Assembly, on the far north side.
14. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High."
15. Oh, but you shall be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

⁹⁵ A good source of information on this general topic is Arjan Zuiderhoek's *The Politics of Munificence in the Roman World: Citizens, Elites and Benefactors in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

From the tone of Isaiah's prophecy, it was clear that the haughty boast of this "light-bringer" displeased God. Satan would have been eager to be sent after this light-bringer fellow who dared to aspire to a throne beside God. And after Satan's disappointing encounter with Jesus in the Temptation, and especially after hearing some of Jesus' preaching, Satan would have seen Jesus as the light-bringer of those verses from Isaiah. The bringer of light, after all, is who Jesus claimed to be:

John 8

12. Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world! He who follows me will never walk in darkness, but he will have the light of life."

John 9

5. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world!

Satan knew the scriptures well enough to remember that God condemned false teachers who ignited fires of zeal in their followers and then basked in the light of their disciples. He also remembered God's promise to those false teachers who considered their disciples to be lights in Israel:

Isaiah 50

11. All of you [false teachers] who kindle a fire, surrounding yourselves with sparks [followers]! Walk by the flame of your fire, and with the sparks you ignite. This you will have from my hand: You will lie down in a place of torment.

Jesus not only said that he was the light of the world; he also told his followers that *they* were lights in the world (Mt. 5:14). Satan would have considered those who followed Jesus to be nothing but sparks ignited by the misguided light-bringer and condemned by God with him. He would have felt honored to be used by God to lay Jesus down in a place of torment and to extinguish the sparks that followed him. As for Jesus, even as the time for his death drew near, he encouraged those sparks to continue in the light they had been given.

John 12

35. The light is with you just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light so that the darkness does not overtake you, for the one who walks in darkness does not know where he is going.
36. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may be sons of light.

Satan heard these statements, and it all seemed to fit. But Jesus was bringing light to all mankind, the light of God's kind of life, and his doing so altered the course of human history. After John received the light of God's life, he rejoiced that God sent His Son to bring that life to men:

John 1

4. In him was life, and the life was the light of men,
5. and the light is shining in the darkness, but the darkness did not grasp it.
6. There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

7. He came as a witness, to bear witness of the light, so that through him all men might believe.
8. He was not the light; rather, he came to bear witness of the light.
9. This was the true light, which sheds light on all men when it comes into the world.

The light that the Son of God brought was the holy life, the holy Spirit, which the Father had given him (Jn. 5:26), and which the Father gave Jesus' followers on the day of Pentecost, and which He still gives to all who believe and obey His Son (Jn. 7:37–39; Acts 5:32; 1Jn. 5:10).

The light-bringer of Isaiah's prophecy was not Jesus. It was Satan. Satan's kind of light is a delusion. It is darkness that calls itself light. But Satan was so cursed by God that he believed that the darkness he carried within himself *was* light. Satan's "light" persuades men to believe, as Satan believed, that God thinks what He does not think, and to believe, as Satan believed, that they are what they are not, and to feel confident, as Satan felt, that God will someday give them what He will never give them. Satan and his sons are the ones who will "lie down in a place of torment", not Jesus and those who love him.

Satan's "knowledge" is not knowledge at all. His knowledge is worse than ignorance, for those who are confident in a lie have no more hunger for the true knowledge of God. That kind of "knowledge" about God is the kind of "light" that is spread by Satan and his sons, and with it, they persuade those who do not know God that they *do* know Him. Thus, they take unsuspecting souls further away from God than ever, telling them that they are drawing closer.

Matthew 23

15. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees! *You* hypocrites! You compass land and sea to make one convert, and when it is done, you make him twice as sure of damnation as you *are*.

Misguided teachers are the blind who lead the blind (Mt. 15:14; Lk. 6:39), and they all live together in a pit that they call a mountain. They believe that God is a kind of God that He is not, and so, they look forward to being judged (as Satan did), expecting that it will bring them blessing. The prophet Amos warned the sparks whom false teachers of his day had ignited:

Amos 5

18. Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! Why should you want the day of the LORD? It will be darkness and not light.

Paul described the real light-bringer and his sons:

2Corinthians 11

13. Such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ.
14. And no wonder, for Satan is disguising himself as a messenger of light.
15. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works.

Those who claim to represent Christ without being anointed and sent by God to do so are the light-bringer's offspring, and the light they bring is the worst kind of darkness (Mt. 6:23).

Satan was wrong to think Jesus was the boastful light-bringer about whom Isaiah prophesied. But then, he was wrong about everything. He was wrong in heaven when he thought God would promote him. He was wrong in the wilderness when he thought he was meeting only Mary's son. He was wrong about the reason he was there in the wilderness in the first place. He was wrong about who he was, and who God was, and who we are who walk in the light of the Son. And he continues to be wrong as he walks about on earth "seeking whom he may devour" (1Pet. 5:8). He is just wrong, and God will never allow him to repent and be made right.

Satan knew that the prophets predicted that the Messiah would experience both great honor and great suffering, but he was wrong in assuming that honor and suffering would happen to the Messiah in that order. He saw Jesus as honored by being offered the position of god of this world, but then having to suffer because he refused that position. That was backward. The right order is given by Peter:

1Peter 1

10. The prophets who prophesied of the grace that *has come* to you earnestly sought and diligently inquired about this salvation,
11. trying to determine who or what time the Spirit of Christ that was in them was indicating when it testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

Jesus' suffering came first, in this world, and Jesus' glory came afterward, with his resurrection and subsequent glorification. Satan was wrong about that, too.

PROMOTION

One could infer from a few comments I have made that when Jesus ascended, he was promoted to sit at God's right hand. But that is only how Satan saw it. Nothing could be farther from the truth, and I should explain why that is the case. Plants are never promoted to act as animals; animals are never promoted to act as humans; humans are never promoted to act as angels; angels are never promoted to act as cherubs; and cherubs, such as Satan, are never promoted to act as the Son of God, sitting at God's right hand. Only plants can be plants, and only the Son of God can sit at the Father's right hand.

As an earthly example, if God has ordained for a child to one day become a pastor, and then that child grows up and becomes a pastor, it is not that he has been promoted; it is only that he has become who he was ordained by God to be. That child can in wisdom and strength, and he can receive spiritual gifts to enable him to fulfill his appointed destiny, but he can never become more than what God ordained him to be from the beginning. It is possible for him to fall short of becoming what God ordained him to be, or even to be removed by God from his office the way Satan was cast out of his office in heaven, but he can never become more than what God has ordained him to be.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ This is similar to how it is with God's Book of Life. The names of all whom God has ever called (both under the Old and New Testaments) were written in His Book of Life "from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8; 17:8). These souls may have their names removed from His Book (Rev. 22:19; Ex. 32:33), but (contrary to popular Christian myth) no new name is ever added.

When the Son of God returned to heaven and sat down at God's right hand, he was only doing what he had been created to do. His glorification to sit at the Father's right hand was not a promotion for him. It had been his appointed place before the world began, and it is his unshakable place forever. In spite of the fact that Satan had never seen a promotion given to any creature in God's kingdom, he somehow came to expect one. But to reign in glory with the Father was far beyond what cherubs were created to do or to be. One can grow in knowledge and strength only within the boundaries of his own kind of life, and one can function only within those same boundaries.

Hoping to be promoted to sit at God's right hand, Satan labored to be counted worthy of that supremely high office, and God used Satan's self-willed blindness to accomplish His holy purposes. Ministers on earth who are like Satan also labor to be counted worthy of promotions, and they envy one another and compete with one another for them. But religions that offer the promotions those men seek cannot make them anything in God's kingdom. It is foolish to strive for a promotion from God. God does not promote; He creates. It is also foolish to envy someone ordained to a higher calling in God's kingdom. If one has been ordained by God to a position, no one can take it from him, and if one has not been ordained to a position, no one can give it to him. Satan's sons, like their father, are always looking for a promotion, and within man-made religious institutions, they are often given one. But such a system has no part with God's kind of life, and the titles and offices granted by those institutions are a lie.

Moses' cousin Korah is a perfect example of how a son of Satan thinks and behaves. Though greatly blessed to work among the most holy things in the tabernacle, Korah envied Aaron and his priesthood. To obtain the priesthood in Israel, Korah persuaded most of Israel to rebel against Moses and Aaron, telling them that Moses had promoted himself and Aaron to the offices they held. Moses' humble response to this attempted coup d'état was that they should all meet before the tabernacle and let God declare who was ordained to the priesthood and who was not.

Numbers 16

1. Now, Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took
2. men of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, chosen men of the Assembly, men of reputation, and they rose up before Moses.
3. And they assembled against Moses and against Aaron, and they said to them, "*You take* too much on yourselves! For the whole congregation is holy – all of them – and Jehovah is in their midst! Why then do you exalt yourselves above the Assembly of Jehovah?"
4. And when Moses heard *this*, he fell on his face.
5. Then he spoke to Korah and to all his congregation, saying, "In the morning, Jehovah will show who is His, and who is holy, and He will cause *him* to draw near to Him. And He will cause the one He has chosen for Himself to draw near Him.
6. Do this. Take censers for yourselves, Korah and all his congregation,

7. and put fire in them, and lay incense on them before Jehovah tomorrow. And it will be that the one whom Jehovah chooses, he is holy. *You take* too much on yourselves, *you* sons of Levi!”
8. And Moses said to Korah, “Hear *me* now, you sons of Levi!
9. Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel to bring you near to Him to do the work of the tabernacle of Jehovah and to stand before the congregation to serve them?
10. He has brought you, *Korah*, near, and all your brothers, the sons of Levi, with you, and you are after the priesthood as well?
11. That is why you and your congregation have assembled yourselves against Jehovah! As for Aaron, what is he, that you murmur against him?”

Only Moses could be Moses. Only Aaron could be Aaron. And only Korah and his fellow Kohathites could do the work of the tabernacle appointed for them. Everyone who was thankful for his place occupied it with joy, and everyone who was not thankful grew discontent with the ordination of God. To envy someone in a higher position is to condemn God for making the mistake of giving that position to a less deserving creature. It is, in truth, to consider oneself to be wiser than God, who places “the members, each one, in the body as He pleases” (1Cor. 12:18).

JESUS’ CRIMES

As heaven’s Accuser, or Prosecutor of transgressors of the law, Satan was very attentive to everything Jesus did and said, in hope of catching him in some infraction of the law and then using that crime as further justification for destroying him. His earthly “sons” followed his lead. We often find them watching Jesus carefully, like a hungry hawk circling high over a henhouse (Mk. 3:1–2; Lk. 14:1; 20:20). But knowing that he was being watched like a hawk did not deter Jesus at all. Jesus boldly followed the counsel he gave to me, many years ago now: “When you’re being watched like a hawk, don’t act like a chicken.”

Jesus was a good Jew who studiously observed the law. Unfortunately, he is often depicted as a rebel against the law of Moses, as if the law was a bad thing, but that was never the case. *Jesus was a “meek and lowly” servant of God who kept God’s commandments* (Mt. 11:29; Jn. 15:10), and he warned others to do the same if they wanted eternal life (Mk. 10:17–19). Moreover, whenever the Jews’ tradition of the elders did not contradict Moses’ law, Jesus observed those traditions, (Jn. 10:22–23), and he commanded his disciples and others to follow his example (Mt. 23:1–3).

But Jesus’ faithful observance of the law of Moses and Jewish tradition did not prevent his enemies from accusing him of transgressing them. Certain Pharisees among his disciples grumbled because, in their view, Jesus allowed other disciples to transgress the law of the Sabbath when they plucked some heads of grain to eat as they walked through a field on a Sabbath day (Mt. 12:1–2). But the law from Jesus’ Father specifically allowed hungry travelers to do such “work”, with no restrictions concerning the day (Dt. 23:24–25). It was the tradition of the elders that forbade it, and Jesus refused to acknowledge the authority of any tradition that restricted the liberty God had granted to His people.

God ordained the weekly Sabbath as a day of rest for His people (Ex. 20:8–11). It was Satan’s sons who turned it into a day set aside for worship. To assure that the people worshipped on that day, Jewish leaders developed a host of Sabbath rules that made it illegal for them to do much of anything but worship. In Acts 1:12, we learn that the elders had invented a rule restricting the distance a Jew could walk on the Sabbath,⁹⁷ which means that if someone got his rest by taking a stroll and he wanted to go on a long walk on the Sabbath, he was out of luck. He’d have to get his rest some other day.

What infuriated Jesus and what surely still infuriates him is that in a religion of rites and rules, religious leaders always end up elevating things above people. They make people slaves to such things as holy days, relics, holy sites, and special religious clothing, instead of ministering to people’s needs by the Spirit. Once, when some scribes and Pharisees criticized Jesus for transgressing their Sabbath day rules, he straitly answered them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath!” (Mk. 2:27). In the grainfield just mentioned, Jesus paused and tried to help his upset disciples understand that God cares more about people than about ceremonial correctness:

Matthew 12

3. He said to them, “Haven’t you read what David did when he was hungry, he and those with him,
4. how he went into the house of God and ate the sacred bread that was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him, but for the priests alone?
5. Or haven’t you read in the law that on the Sabbath day, the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath [by making sacrifices, lighting the candles, etc.] and yet are innocent?”

Jesus went on to tell them, “If you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice’, you would not have condemned the innocent” (Mt. 12:7), but *when things become more important than people, innocent people always end up being condemned*. Jesus ended his conversation in the wheat field by telling those frustrated disciples, “The Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath” (Mt. 12:8). In other words, “If I say what these others are doing is okay, then it is. You don’t get to make the rules for my Sabbath.” But a comment like that would have driven away even the best of his disciples.

By the time the Son came to earth, the sons of the Accuser had fallen into the grievous error of elevating their traditions to the level of authority that belonged only to God’s eternal doctrines (Mt. 15:1–9), and sometimes, they even gave their traditions precedence over God’s commandments. This, Jesus would not do, and he sharply rebuked Satan’s sons for “making the word of God of no effect by your tradition” (Mk. 7:13).

Jesus was frequently condemned by sons of the Accuser for healing people on the Sabbath. But Jesus refused to stop doing that. At times, it seems that he healed people on the Sabbath just to provoke the Accuser’s sons, as when he healed a man before their very eyes – not only on the Sabbath, but in their synagogue!

⁹⁷ This was probably based on a misapplication of Exodus 16:29b: “Let every man remain in his tent! Let no one leave his place on the seventh day!”

Mark 3

1. And again, he went into the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand.
2. And some were watching him closely, *to see* if he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might bring charges against him.
3. But he said to the man who had the withered hand, “Stand up in the midst.”
4. And then he said to them, “Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath, or to do evil? To save life, or to kill?” But they remained silent.
5. Then, looking around at them with anger, being grieved at the hardness of their heart, he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand!” And he stretched *it* out, and his hand was restored as healthy as the other.
6. And the Pharisees went out immediately and began to plot against him with the Herodians, how they might destroy him.

By healing on the Sabbath, Jesus did not break a commandment. It was unreasonable for Satan’s sons to think that healing was to be forbidden on the day that God set apart for rest. Being healed is one of the best forms of rest. But taking into the heart wrong ideas about God can drive otherwise sensible people into spiritual madness. Even Plato, an ancient heathen philosopher, knew as much, and he made this famous observation: “Whatever deceives, bewitches.”⁹⁸ When anyone takes into his heart a wrong idea about God, that wrong idea has the power to bewitch him; that is, to blind his mind to even the simplest truths. Most of Israel at Jesus’ time had been deceived, and because of that, they had been blinded, not by a witch but by God, who had turned them over to the lies they loved:

John 12

37. Even though so many miracles had been done by him in their presence, they did not believe in him.
-
39. This is why they could not believe, because Isaiah said again,
40. “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and understand with their heart and be converted, and I should heal them.”

Jesus committed no crimes against the law, and whenever he did not do as the traditions of the elders demanded, it was only because he was humbling himself to “the higher power” of the commandments of God. But his submission to God’s commandments above the commandments of men did not prevent his being accused of crimes against God. He confessed to being God’s Son, but he never committed the blasphemy of claiming to be God’s equal. Nevertheless, his enemies accused him of doing so:

⁹⁸ *The Republic of Plato*, Chapter 19. The ancient philosopher, Gorgias of Leontini, agreed with this sentiment in his “Encomium on Helen”: “The power of speech over the constitution of the soul can be compared with the effect of drugs on the bodily state. . . . By means of a harmful kind of persuasion, words can drug and bewitch the soul.” Kathleen Freeman, translator, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), p. 133.

John 5

17. Jesus answered them, "Up to now, my Father is working, and I also work."
18. For this reason, the Jews then wanted all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, *they said*, but he was also calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

How they came to the conclusion that Jesus calling God his Father meant that he was claiming to be equal with God is hard to see. When I call George Clark my father, I certainly am not claiming to be equal with him. But then, spiritual madness causes men to draw bizarre conclusions from the simplest statements. The men who made that strange accusation against Jesus made it in the face of Jesus' repeated confessions of complete dependence upon God for everything, even for his life (Jn. 6:57). Jesus plainly stated that the Father was greater than he (Jn. 14:28), and in spite of what he was accused of, Jesus never felt any other way.

JESUS' CRIMES THAT WERE OBVIOUS . . . OR WERE THEY?

Crime #1: *Drinking Blood*

Some of the commandments that God gave Moses for Israel are so plain that the meaning cannot be missed. God's commandment not to consume any blood is a case in point:

Leviticus 7

26. You shall not consume any kind of blood, whether of fowl or of animal, in any of your dwellings.
27. Any soul who consumes any kind of blood, that soul shall be cut off from his people.

Leviticus 17

10. Anyone of the house of Israel or of the sojourners sojourning among them who consumes any kind of blood, I will set my face against that person who consumes the blood, and I will cut him off from among his people.

No one in Israel could have been in doubt as to the meaning of those commandments. God's people were absolutely forbidden to consume any blood whatsoever. But Jesus stood up in the synagogue at Capernaum and proclaimed, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life within you" (Jn. 6:53b). To many of Jesus' disciples, and no doubt to others in the synagogue that day, it seemed that Jesus was forcing them to choose between believing him or believing God. To them, Jesus' doctrine was clearly contrary to God's commandment forbidding the consumption of blood, and they would have none of it:

John 6

66. At this, many of his disciples left and went back, and no longer walked with him.

As for Satan, the Prosecutor of the law, this was just the sort of thing he was looking for. He would have misunderstood Jesus as much as did the offended disciples, and he would have viewed what Jesus said as more justification for trying to get rid of him, for God's law seemed to be on the side of the offended disciples. That being so, it is difficult to find fault with those who

walked away from Jesus, for they knew the commandments of God, and they knew that the words Jesus spoke were contrary to them. Would we have understood Jesus any better than they? Would we have been less offended? One hopes so, but who among us can say for sure that he would have been like the few disciples who stayed, though they really didn't know why they stayed any more than the other disciples really knew why they went away?

Before that large number of disciples stormed away, Jesus tried to explain to them that he was speaking spiritually and that he was not saying that they should drink his physical blood.⁹⁹ He told them,

John 6

63. It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh is worthless. The words that I am speaking to you, they are spirit and they are life!

But they would not listen. They had heard all they wanted to hear from this man. This was an obvious crime against God's law. Or was it?

Crime #2: A Friend of Sinners

Satan would also have seen justification for killing Jesus in the fact that wherever Jesus went, he had more in common with base sinners than with the more respectable members of society, such as the scribes, priests, and Pharisees (Mt. 11:19; Mk. 2:15–16). Many of those scribes, priests, and Pharisees felt as Satan did about Jesus' association with sinners (Lk. 7:36–39), and Satan valued them. But Jesus saw their hypocrisy and provoked them to even more indignation when he bluntly told the chief priests and scribes that God would take harlots into His kingdom before He would take them (Mt. 21:31b–32).

Satan took the side of Pharisees, priests, and scribes rather than the side of harlots because the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders were so much like him. They knew how to hide their wickedness behind proper ceremonial form, whereas the sin of such people as harlots could not be hidden, which made such sinners easy targets for hypocrites. But Jesus never shot at easy targets. He didn't have to; they already knew they were guilty. And when the hypocrites complained that Jesus did not maintain what they considered to be an appropriate distance between himself and sinners, he did not back down:

Matthew 9

10. As he dined in the house, it happened that many tax collectors and sinners came and reclined at the table with Jesus and his disciples.
11. The Pharisees, looking on, said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"
12. But when Jesus heard *this*, he said to them, "Those who are well do not need a doctor, but those who are sick.
13. Go and learn what it means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice'. I didn't come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

⁹⁹ See Footnote 22, page 40.

Sinners who came to Jesus found welcome and forgiveness, but equally important to their hearts, they found someone who had the courage to love them even in the presence of the Accuser's sons:

Luke 7

36. Now, a certain man, one of the Pharisees, asked him to eat with him. And so, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.
37. And behold, a woman of the city who was a sinner found out that he was dining in the Pharisee's house, and she brought an alabaster flask of perfume.
38. And as she stood behind *him* at his feet, crying, she began to wet his feet with the tears, and then she wiped them dry with the hair of her head. And then, she tenderly kissed his feet and anointed *them* with the perfume.
39. Seeing *this*, the Pharisee who had invited him said within himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner."
40. And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he said, "Teacher, say on."
41. "There was a certain lender *who had* two debtors. The one owed five hundred denarii, and the other, fifty.
42. When they had nothing to pay, he freely forgave both. So tell me, which of them will love him more?"
43. Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one to whom he forgave the more." He said to him, "You have judged rightly."
44. Then, turning to the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? When I came into your house, you didn't provide water for my feet, but she washed my feet with tears and dried them with the hair of her head.
45. You gave me no kiss, but she, from the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss my feet.
46. You didn't anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with perfume.
47. I tell you, it is because her many sins are forgiven that she has shown much love, but he who is forgiven of a little, loves a little."
48. Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."
49. But those reclining with him at the table began to say among themselves, "Who is this that even forgives sins?"
50. Then he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

As previously mentioned, when the scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus the woman caught in the act of adultery, they were hoping to trap him into rendering a judgment that would contradict the law. If Jesus fell into their trap and contradicted the law's judgment of death for the adulteress (Lev. 20:10),¹⁰⁰ then they and Satan would have even more reason to condemn

¹⁰⁰ Both the adulterer and the adulteress were condemned to death by the law. We do not know why these hypocrites did not arrest the man with the woman. After all, if they caught her "in the very act", there must have been a man there.

him. But the wisdom Jesus quietly received from his Father saved him from their trap, and when he answered them, he agreed with the law's judgment that the woman was worthy of death. He merely insisted that the judgment of God's holy law be carried out by holy people:

John 8

7. As they persisted in questioning him, he stood up and said to them, "[Let the law's sentence be carried out, but] let him among you who is without sin cast the first stone at her."
8. And once more stooping down, he wrote upon the ground.
9. Then, one at a time, starting with the oldest, the men who heard this went away, convicted by their own conscience, and Jesus was left alone, with the woman still in the midst.
10. And when Jesus stood up and saw no one except the woman, he said to her, "Woman, where are those men, your accusers? Did no one condemn you?"
11. She said, "No one, sir." Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and sin no more."

Jesus was the only one present who was qualified to throw a stone at the woman, and he would not.

Crime #3: "Nothing Is Unclean"

Jesus came closest to committing a crime against the law of God when he proclaimed a doctrine that plainly contradicted the part of the law that forbade God's people to eat certain kinds of meat (Lev. 11). As in the case of God's commandment not to consume any blood, the law was perfectly clear on this point, especially when it forbade the Israelites to eat such things as roaches:

Leviticus 11

42. Everything that crawls on *its* belly, which goes upon four or many feet, of all the swarming things that swarm on the earth, you shall not eat them, for they are detestable.
43. You shall not make your souls detestable by *eating* any swarming thing that swarms; you shall not make yourselves unclean by them or defile yourselves by them.
44. I am the LORD your God! You shall sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy, for I am holy. You shall not make your souls unclean with any swarming thing that creeps upon the earth.

Jesus spoke contrary to this law on a day when he was utterly exasperated at the hardness of man's heart, and weary to the bone from years of dealing with disciples who understood nothing. As has been explained, Jesus knew truth about God that was so foreign to humans that if he had preached it before God's kind of life was given to them, they could not have borne it, and nobody would have been his disciple. Besides, because it was not God's time for some truth to be spoken, it would have been sin for Jesus to speak it, and he knew that. *New Testament doctrine was false doctrine before God ordained it to be preached.*

On this day, the extremely irritated Jesus blasted the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy, and then angrily summoned the multitude to him. That is the moment when he came the closest he ever did to destroying people with knowledge that was ahead of its time:

Matthew 15

10. Then he summoned the multitude and said to them, “Listen! And understand!
11. It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man! On the contrary! What comes out of the mouth – that defiles a man!”
12. Then his disciples approached him and said, “Did you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard that saying?”
13. But he answered and said, “Every plant which my heavenly Father did not plant will be uprooted!
14. Leave them! They are blind guides of blind people. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.”
15. Then Peter answered and said to him, “Explain this parable to us.”
16. But Jesus said, “Are you also still without understanding?
17. Don’t you yet see that everything that enters the mouth passes on to the belly and then is discharged into the latrine?
18. But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart! Those things defile a man!
19. Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, immoral acts, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies.
20. These are things that defile a man! But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man!”

A man of God who never reaches the level of frustration with Satan’s sons that Jesus reached that day has never really seen how much harm Satan’s sons are doing to God’s people. In our time, many of Satan’s sons teach that anger and hatred are sinful emotions. If that were true, even God would be a sinner, for He can become very angry (Jer. 7:20; 2Cor. 5:11), and He not only hates but abhors certain people and deeds (Hos. 8:15; Zech. 8:17; Rev. 2:6, 15). Anger and hatred are holy emotions if they are God’s kind of anger and God’s kind of hatred. It is “the wrath of man” that “does not work the righteousness of God” (Jas. 1:20).

We know that Jesus did not do evil when he angrily declared the above truths to the helplessly ignorant multitude, for he lived “without sin” (Heb. 4:15). I wish I was able to explain how his words in this case can be taken in a spiritual sense and, so, do not actually contradict the law, but I cannot. His doctrine that day plainly contradicted the law; it was doctrine that belongs only on our side of Pentecost.

Fortunately for those listening to Jesus that day, he turned their minds away from his statement that nothing entering a man’s mouth can defile him, and he needed to. Many of them would have known that the law declared that people could be defiled by eating something unclean (Lev. 11:43–44). But Jesus focused the people’s attention on the Pharisees’ false teaching that eating with unwashed hands defiled a man. On that subject, the law of Moses said nothing.

In Jesus' defense, if the worst thing he ever did was tell God's people too much truth one day, that alone would make him the holiest person ever to walk the earth. But even that defense leaves us with unanswered questions. It is better just to take into consideration the fact that God Himself once grew so frustrated with the wicked rulers of His people that He commanded Hosea – contrary to the law – to find a harlot and marry her (Hos. 1:2–3). And later, He told that same prophet to go take a man's wife away from him and live with her in adultery (Hos. 3:1–5). God also commanded Isaiah to take a certain prophetess, and before witnesses, father a child by her (Isa. 8:1–3). God's law strictly forbade such immoral deeds (Lev. 19:29; Ex. 20:14). Again, contrary to the law's rules about abstaining from unclean foods, God commanded Ezekiel to use human feces when he cooked his meals!

Ezekiel 4

10. "Your food, which you will eat, *shall be* by weight, twenty shekels each day. From time to time, you will eat it.
11. And you will drink water by measure, one-sixth of a hin *each day*. From time to time, you will drink.
12. And you will eat it *as* a cake of barley; before their eyes, you will bake it, using human dung."
13. And the LORD said, "Thus will the children of Israel eat their polluted bread among the nations where I will banish them."

The old saying applies: "Desperate times call for desperate measures." That is the only way to explain God commanding Hosea to commit adultery and Ezekiel to eat unclean food. It is also the only way to explain God's allowing David and the young men with him to eat forbidden, holy bread and allowing the priests to do their work on the Sabbath day.

Throughout the history of God's working with men, He made exceptions to His own rules when keeping the rules would have hurt people. It is true that "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath," but the same could be said for the law as a whole. The entire law, not just the Sabbath, was made for man. God did not permit His people to neglect the law just when it suited their own purposes; however, when the souls of men benefitted more by not keeping the law, God was all for it. Satan, on the other hand, saw man as having been made for the law, a subservient creature who was required to adhere to every precept, under all conditions.

THE FIG TREE

One other time before the heart-rending scene in the garden of Gethsemane did Jesus seem to buckle under the weight of his burden. It happened the morning after Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem (Mt. 21:7–11), just days before his crucifixion. Upon entering the city, Jesus went directly up to the temple, "and when he had looked all around, it already being evening, he went out to Bethany with the twelve" to spend the night (Mk. 11:11). We know what Jesus saw in the temple when he "looked all around" and what must have eaten at him all that night, for early the next morning, he went back to Jerusalem,

Mark 11

- 15b. and when Jesus had entered the temple, he began to cast out those buying and selling in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those selling doves,
16. and he would not let anyone carry a vessel through the temple.
17. And he began teaching them, saying, “Isn’t it written, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?’ But you have made it a hideout for robbers!”

Jesus’ indignation is understandable, under the circumstances. Any of God’s more fearless prophets might have done something like Jesus did if sufficiently provoked. But the particular act that suggests that Jesus was struggling under his heavy load is what he did earlier that morning. Mark tells us that while on his way to the temple, Jesus grew hungry,

Mark 11

13. and seeing in the distance a fig tree with leaves, he came, if by chance he might find something on it. But when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not time for figs.
14. And Jesus answered and said to it, “Let no one ever eat fruit from you again!” And his disciples were listening.

The unfortunate fig tree died “at once” (Mt. 21:19). Of course, it was unreasonable for Jesus to become angry with a fig tree for having no figs when it wasn’t even time for fig trees to bear, but the tree’s fruitlessness is not what made Jesus angry. Throughout the night before he cursed the fig tree, his mind was haunted by these scenes which had confronted him the previous afternoon when he stood up and “looked all around” his Father’s temple. Had Jesus made it all the way to the temple with that fury burning within him, and if he had unleashed it on the merchants there, none of them would have survived. They would have withered up as the poor fig tree did. Fortunately for us, Jesus came to save, not to destroy (Lk. 9:56), and he took his anger out on a fig tree instead of on men.



SECTION 4: THE CRUCIFIXION

Must I not drink the cup that my Father has given me?

John 18:11b

SIFTED

Something Jesus said to Peter during the Last Supper shows us that Satan still had personal access to God in heaven at that time:

Luke 22

31. Then the Lord said, “O Simon, Simon! Satan has asked for you [this “you” is plural, referring to all the disciples], that he might sift *you* as wheat.
32. But I have prayed for you [this “you” is singular, referring to Peter], that your [Peter’s] faith will not give out.”

When Satan “asked for” Jesus’ disciples, whom could he have asked? There would have been no point in him asking Pontius Pilate or Caiaphas, for the disciples were not theirs. The only one Satan could have asked is God. No one else could have granted such a request. Jesus’ statement, moreover, strongly suggests that God granted Satan’s request, for Jesus did not say to Peter, “I have prayed for you, that you will not be sifted.” Rather, he said, “I have prayed for you, that your faith will not give out [i.e., when Satan sifts you].”

Peter’s sifting came later that night. At the Last Supper, Jesus told Peter that within a few hours he would deny him. But according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Peter adamantly rejected Jesus’ warning:

Mark 14 (cp. Mt. 26:35)

31. *Peter* spoke all the more vehemently, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!” And they all began talking like that.

Luke 22

33. *Peter* said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death!”
34. But he said, “I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow today before you deny three times that you know me.”

We are not told how the heavenly conversation between God and Satan went when God handed Peter over to Satan, but God’s care for His people makes it certain that it was God’s idea to sift Peter, not Satan’s. We are not told why Satan asked for Jesus’ disciples (perhaps it was to accuse them in God’s court on some point of law), and so, we do not know what Satan intended to sift out of them. But what he wanted doesn’t matter anyway. All that matters is that *God* wanted to sift something out of Jesus’ disciples, Peter especially, and He gave Peter to Satan to have it done.

Peter’s sifting took place in the courtyard of the high priest when a little slave girl recognized him as being a disciple of Jesus:

Matthew 26

70. But he denied *it* before them all, saying, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”
71. But after he went out to the outer court, another slave girl saw him, and she said to those who were there, “This man was also with Jesus the Nazarene.”
72. And again, with an oath, he denied *it*, saying, “I don’t know the man!”
73. A little while later, those standing by came up to Peter and said, “Yes, you are definitely one of them; your accent gives you away.”
74. Then he began to curse and swear, “I do not know the man!” And immediately, the cock crowed.

75. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had told him: “Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out, and wept bitterly.

The man, Peter, who rebuked Jesus when Jesus spoke of his approaching death and audaciously promised Jesus that he would save him (Mt. 16:21–23), the one who told Jesus that he was wrong to say that Peter would deny him and who swore that he would die for him – *that* man – was sifted out of Peter’s soul in the high priest’s courtyard. Peter lost all of his proud self-confidence, just as young Saul of Tarsus would later lose his on the dusty road to Damascus (Acts 9). But Jesus had prayed for Peter, and Jesus’ prayer saved him. Peter could not have recovered after so vilely denying the Lord, except for the intercession of the Lord whom he denied.¹⁰¹

Peter had so little self-confidence remaining after God sifted him that he could not even give a direct answer when the resurrected Jesus asked Peter if he loved him. He could only say that he was Jesus’ friend. Here is the scene as John described it:

John 21

15. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Surely, Lord, you know that I am your friend.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.”
16. Again, he said to him a second time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?” He said to him, “Surely, Lord, you know that I am your friend.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.”
17. The third time, he said to him, “Simon, son of Jonah, are you my friend?” Peter was grieved that Jesus said to him the third time, “Are you my friend?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I am your friend.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

Peter no longer dared to boast of his devotion to Jesus. Peter did love him, but the excessive self-esteem that had formerly tainted Peter’s expressions of that love was now sifted out of his heart. Peter had begun to learn an essential lesson of spiritual life; namely, that we humans know nothing as we should, not even ourselves – perhaps especially ourselves – and that God knows the heart, and He alone.¹⁰² After God humbled Saul of Tarsus, he, like Peter, tried to pass on to others this valuable truth:

1Corinthians 4

3. To me, it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human judgment; indeed, I do not even judge myself.
4. I am conscious of nothing against myself; however, I am not justified by that. The Lord is the one who judges me.

¹⁰¹ In an odd twist, Judas was damned after he confessed to knowing Jesus, while Peter was saved after he denied knowing him. God knew their hearts.

¹⁰² Peter preached this after he was born again on the day of Pentecost (Acts 15:8).

5. So, judge nothing before the time, but wait until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and expose the intentions of hearts, and then from God will praise be given to each one.

God has never allowed Satan to learn this lesson, and He never will. Satan is damned while he is yet living, even before the terrible Day of Judgment comes. God saved Peter from himself, but He condemned Satan to the bondage of his own will. That is why Peter was later converted, and why Satan is still Satan.

At the same time, God is still God, and He still uses Satan to accomplish His purposes. Paul told the Corinthian saints that God had been using “a messenger of Satan” to keep him from becoming proud (2Cor. 12:7). Paul also made it clear that God will turn His children over to Satan if they persist in rejecting His gentler corrective measures (1Cor. 5:1–5). That may seem harsh, but it was a good thing for certain leaders of the congregation in Ephesus. Paul turned them over to Satan for promulgating a particularly bad doctrine, but God’s good purpose for turning them over to Satan was to teach them not to do that (1Tim. 1:20). In other words, there was hope for them yet. In their case, it was good that Satan was still around so that they could be turned over to him and learn to fear God and do His will. So, although God has cast Satan out of heaven, both God and Satan are still themselves. We are the ones who can change, and we should thank God for that.

GOD’S CUP, NOT SATAN’S

Like Saul, who attempted and failed several times to kill David, angry men made several unsuccessful attempts to kill Jesus (Lk. 4:28–29; Jn. 8:58–59; 10:31–39). None of those attempts had a place in God’s plan for His Son; they were merely spontaneous acts of rage. There was an appointed time for Jesus to die, and that time had not yet come. Satan would have known that, for he was in charge of killing Jesus. Besides, it was beneath Satan’s dignity to take part in an unruly mob of inflamed humans rashly attacking God’s Messiah. Satan despises anarchy and disorganized hotheads. He goes about his work in a much more sophisticated, orderly manner.

Satan and his sons are the law-and-order type. They *use* the law to accomplish their evil; they do not rebel against it. They plan their moves carefully (Mt. 22:15; Mk. 3:6; Jn. 11:53), and they consider the ramifications, especially how their status and general well-being might be affected (Mt. 26:5; Mk. 11:18). Perfect hatred, like perfect love, can wait. It watches and thinks as it moves in for the kill. When it was God’s time for Jesus to die, Jesus knew it (Jn. 12:23; 13:1; 17:1), and Satan would have known it, too. Everything was in place. Jesus was ready to face the cross and finish his work, and Satan was ready to take possession of Judas and finish his.

Jesus told his disciples of days to come when men would persecute and kill them, “thinking to do God service” (Jn. 16:2). And even as he spoke to them, Jesus knew that Satan was in the process of doing that to him. Both Satan and Israel’s leaders saw themselves as doing God service as they maneuvered to have Jesus arrested and executed – and in truth, they were.

Satan and many in Israel had no love for Jesus, but they loved God *as they thought God was*. This is the reason that the apostle John called Satan’s sons “antichrist”, not “antigod” (1Jn. 2:18). It is a little-known but long-established fact that in the first century AD, when the New

Testament books were written, the Greek word *anti* meant “instead of”, not “against”.¹⁰³ For example, Jesus once asked this question:

Luke 11

11. When a son asks for bread, what father among you will give him a stone? Or *if he asks* for a fish, will he give him a snake instead of [*anti*] a fish?

Satan never has been anti-god. Satan’s dream was to reign *with* God, not to reign instead of Him. But Satan never really knew and loved God as He really is. The god Satan loved and served so faithfully was only a god of his imagination, a god who had no Son, a god who loved himself and held Satan in very great esteem.

Neither Satan nor his sons on earth love the real God or His Son. Nevertheless, working together in the darkness of their common lack of the knowledge of God, they developed a religious institution with the word “Christ” in its title. That religious system honors a son that is different from the one who “suddenly came to his temple” at Jesus’ baptism, and it honors a god other than the One who sent him. And in their Babel of spiritual confusion, Satan’s ministers are as confident of God’s approval and as eager to do God service as Satan was, perhaps still is.¹⁰⁴

Satan knew he was doing God service at the Last Supper when he took possession of Judas (Lk. 22:3; Jn. 13:27) and led him to go out to meet with officers of the high priest. Jesus knew that Satan and Judas were doing God service, too, for he knew whose plan was really being executed. Before he and his disciples left the room where they had been eating the Passover meal, and knowing that Satan had possessed Judas and was meeting with the officers at that moment, Jesus said, “The ruler of this world is coming” (Jn. 14:30). At the same time, when the torch-carrying posse found Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane and Peter pulled out his sword to attack them, Jesus rebuked Peter, saying, “Must I not drink the cup that my Father has given me?” (Jn. 18:11). These two statements, taken together, compel us to deal with an important question: If Jesus saw Satan, now in possession of Judas’ body, as delivering to him a cup of suffering and death *from God*, how can we see it any other way?

Satan was still in Judas in the garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested. Through the betrayer’s eyes, Satan was looking at Jesus as Judas walked up to Jesus and kissed him on the cheek (Lk. 22:47–48). Jesus knew him, and Satan knew Jesus. (Judas didn’t know either one.) They had met face to face in the wilderness, several years earlier. What were their thoughts as they looked at each other in the midst of that human mob with their flickering of torches? Satan had to feel gratified. On Jesus’ part, he was so resigned to do his Father’s will that when Judas, now possessed by Satan himself (Lk. 22:3), gave Jesus the fatal kiss, Jesus still greeted Judas as “friend” (Mt. 26:50). I wonder who Jesus was really talking to, Judas the betrayer or Satan the Accuser?

¹⁰³ H. E. Dana and Julius Mantey, *A Manual of Greek Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: The MacMillan Company, 1955), p. 100.

¹⁰⁴ It may be that Satan still hopes to receive the grand promotion he desired. In the utter darkness of Satan’s cursed soul, it is possible that he sees his expulsion from heaven and Jesus’ glorification as a great test, worthy of the one who will be exalted to the highest place available in creation. If he does think that way, then he is still striving to please God, *as he thinks God is*, just as his sons do. The fact that Satan’s modern sons think they are serving God, suggests that their father thinks so, too. Otherwise, how are they his sons?

An old saint whom we called “Uncle Joe” explained why Jesus did this. He said, “I’ll tell you who your real friends are. Anyone who does something to you that causes you to press on and be obedient to the will of God is your friend.” Both Judas and Satan were playing their appointed roles in God’s plan, and in doing that, they were aiding Jesus in accomplishing God’s will, and, so, were his “friends”. When a man’s ways please God, even those who hate him become that man’s servant, doing only what needs to be done for his good (Prov. 16:7). Satan hated Jesus, but by God’s design, everything Satan did only aided Jesus in fulfilling his mission from God.

Satan knew that Jesus was a holy, anointed man, but knowing that would not have prevented him from killing Jesus any more than it prevented him from afflicting the “perfect and upright” Job. What difference would it have made to Satan for God to send him against Job, David, or Jesus, except that Jesus was greater than the other two, being Israel’s Messiah? God sent him to do it all, and Satan did it all very well, promptly, and with expectation of great reward for the services he rendered.

DOING GOD SERVICE

When Pilate could no longer resist the Jews’ demand that he crucify Jesus, he turned Jesus over to his soldiers for execution.

John 19

16. He handed him over to them to be crucified. Then they took Jesus, and led him away.
17. And bearing his own cross, he went out to the place called “The Place of a Skull”, which is called in Hebrew, “Golgotha”,
18. where they crucified him and two others with him, on the right and on the left, and Jesus in the middle.

It did not normally take many hours for a crucified man to die, but for all of them, death was too long in coming. Crucifixion was horrific. Jesus, writhing in agony on the cross, cried out to his Father, “Why have you forsaken me?” (Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34), but God did not answer him. The men standing there took notice of Jesus’ despairing cry (Mt. 27:26–49), but what would have stood out to Satan was God’s refusal to respond.

Watching from a distance was a large number of women who had followed Jesus from Galilee. They were also disciples, who at their own expense had ministered to the needs of Jesus and his disciples as they traveled (Mt. 27:55; Mk. 15:40–41; cp. Lk. 8:1–3). But at the foot of the bloody cross stood Jesus’ mother with her sister and with John (Jn. 19:25), the disciple who loved Jesus and whom Jesus loved. Mary was close enough to hear her son’s groanings and to see his tears. When Jesus turned his head and saw her, he pulled on the spikes in his hands and pushed on the spikes in his feet to position himself to be able to speak. He paid a price in pain to ask John to take care of his mother for him. And after Jesus died, John took Mary into his home as his own mother (Jn. 19:25–27).

Strangers passing by were not so kindhearted. They joined with the priests and elders in mocking Jesus’ torment, not only daring Jesus to come down from the cross, but also daring God to come rescue him:

Matthew 27

39. Those who passed by reviled him, shaking their heads
40. and saying, “*You* who would destroy the temple and rebuild *it* in three days, save yourself! If you are a son of God, come down from the cross!”
41. The high priests, likewise mocking *him*, along with the scribes and the elders and the Pharisees, kept saying,
42. “He saved others, *but* he cannot save himself! If he is the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in him!
43. He trusted in God; let Him deliver him now, if He will have him! Didn’t he say, ‘I am *the* Son of God?’”

God remained silent when His dying Son cried out to Him, but He could not keep Himself away. He bent the heavens down so that He would be closer to Jesus while he suffered. The Son had foretold of his Father doing that:

Psalm 18

6. In my distress, I will call on the LORD; I will cry out to my God for help. He will hear my voice from His temple, and my plea for help will come to Him, *even* into His ears.
7. Then the earth shook and trembled, and the foundations of the mountains moved; they were shaken because He burned with anger.
8. Smoke went up from His nostrils, and fire from His mouth devoured. Coals were kindled by it.
9. He bowed the heavens also, and came down, and darkness was under His feet.¹⁰⁵

It had never been a secret in heaven that the Messiah was a very special person to God, and even if nothing else had done so, this astonishing event, the bending down of the very heavens, made all of heaven know that God wanted to be in attendance when Jesus died. That, and the trembling earth, told at least one of the Roman soldiers at Calvary that Jesus was very special to God (Mk. 15:39), but did it also reveal to those within the bending heavens that God’s heart was breaking? We cannot say, but it is certain they would have sensed that God was feeling something they had never seen Him feel.

For Satan, God’s silence at the cry of His Son from the cross confirmed what he felt; namely, that even if God was grieved, He wanted justice to be done. The disobedient Messiah had to pay the penalty for his high-minded refusal to accept the honor that God had offered him. And by this time, Satan had figured out that Isaiah was talking about Jesus when he foretold of God being pleased with the death of a certain man, and Satan’s realization of that would have encouraged him. To Satan, Isaiah’s prophecy meant that even if God was grieved, indeed, even if He had tears running down His holy face, in His heart of hearts, He still was pleased with Jesus’ suffering and death. And if that is what Satan thought, he was right, for Isaiah said again,

Isaiah 53

- 10a. It pleased the LORD to crush him; He has put him to grief.

¹⁰⁵ In the Bible, the earth was made dark every time God personally came near it (e.g., Gen. 15:12–18; Dt. 5:2, 23).

11a. He will see the travail of his soul, and be satisfied.

Satan was pleased and satisfied, too. But he would not have been so pleased if he had known who Christ Jesus was, or what God was really doing in him. Paul was speaking of more than human rulers when he wrote that “none of the rulers of this age understood, for had they understood, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1Cor. 2:8). As we have seen, plenty of the rulers of this age are not human, and when Paul said “none” of them understood what God was accomplishing in Christ, he meant just that.

Throughout the whole process – the arrest, the farce of a trial, the mockery and cruel abuse, and finally, the gruesome crucifixion – God never indicated to Satan that He wanted the process to stop. And the crucified Son, whose only remaining joy was in knowing that he was doing the Father’s will, did not cry out for deliverance. So, when Jesus was crucified, Satan was completely confident that in killing Jesus, he was doing God service. In Satan’s eyes, Jesus was an especially anointed, mighty man of God. Indeed, he no doubt knew him to be the mightiest man of God ever to walk the earth. But he also saw Jesus as a proud transgressor who was about to face God’s perfect justice at the hand of the law’s stern Prosecutor.

The previous night, after Peter attacked the men who came to arrest Jesus, Jesus rebuked Peter and told him,

Matthew 26

52. Put your sword back into its place, for all who take up a sword will die by a sword!
53. Do you think that I cannot call on my Father right now, and He will send me more than twelve legions of angels?

Jesus’ question to Peter reveals something not explicitly stated in the Bible; to wit, although the Father did not accept His Son’s desperate prayer in the garden of Gethsemane to find some other way to redeem mankind, He had given Jesus a way out if he wanted it. We know this is true because of what Jesus just said; that is, his Father would send legions of angels to rescue him if he asked for it. And the Father showed the Son that he did not have to yield to human abuse by knocking down the men who had come to Gethsemane to arrest him:

John 18

4. Jesus, knowing all things that were coming upon him, went out and said to them, “Who are you looking for?”
5. They answered, “Jesus of Nazareth.” He said to them, “I am he.” (And Judas, the betrayer, himself stood among them.)
6. Then, when he said to them, “I am he,” they went backward and fell to the ground.

Jesus had been given a choice by the Father. But for our sakes, he humbled himself to the Father’s will – that is, to Satan, and to those wicked men. The Son could have cried out for deliverance, and God would have immediately delivered him. The Son could have made that choice, and we can only imagine what the results of that choice would have been, but he chose to suffer and die because he loved us and wanted us to live forever in fellowship with him and his Father. “And so, the cohort, the tribune, and the deputies of the Jews arrested Jesus” (Jn. 18:12)

and “led *him* away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled” (Mt. 26:57).

Nobody heard God promise Jesus that He would send legions of angels to rescue him if Jesus wanted them to come, and of those who heard Jesus tell about it, even fewer would have believed that God would do that for him, possibly including Satan. When Jesus was in the wilderness being tempted, Satan knew that Jesus was so important to God that angels were assigned to watch over him in case he so much as tripped over a rock. Now, however, in place of angels sent to protect Jesus, God had sent Satan to kill him. By this time in Jesus’ life, he certainly did not have the appearance of a man who had much favor with God. He was generally despised, poor, and so emaciated from fasting and labor that one could count his bones (Ps. 22:17), and he had now been tortured and crucified.

God’s patience while watching His beloved Son die, saved us.

SELFLESS LOVE

Some services to God, such as the crucifixion of Jesus, must be done, but God will not ask good people or good spirits to do them. He did not put it on Peter, James, and John to crucify Jesus because He loved them and had chosen them for salvation. God used Satan and wicked men to kill His Son, and they were glad to do it.

The reason that Satan was so sure he was pleasing God by killing Jesus is that Satan was pleasing *himself* by killing Jesus, and he saw God as “altogether such a one as himself”. God *was* pleased with Jesus’ suffering and death, but it was not for the reason Satan thought. God was pleased because He knew that by the death of His Son, many would be delivered from spiritual darkness and come to know and love His Son, and Him. God loved His Son beyond all measure, and His Son’s agony and cries from the cross tore at His heart, but the Father was willing to give him up for us, and Jesus was willing to be given. There is no greater love than that, no greater demonstration of goodwill toward us who were lost in sin. The depth and height of such love cannot be measured:

Romans 8

31. What, then, shall we say to these things? If God be for us, who *can be* against us?
32. Indeed, He who did not spare His own Son, but gave him up for us all, how shall He not also, with him, freely give us all things?
33. Who shall bring an accusation against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies.
34. Who is the one that condemns? Christ is the one who died, but more than that, who was also raised up, who also is at God’s right hand, *and* who also is making intercession for us.
35. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? *Will* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?
36. (As it is written, “For your sake, we are put to death the whole day; we are thought of as sheep for slaughter.”)
37. No! In all these things, we do more than conquer through him who loved us.

38. I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,
 39. nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

God's willingness to so patiently bear deep grief as when He watched His Son's agony is the most incredible expression of selfless love there has ever been. His desire, and His Son's, was for His Son to come back home and take his place openly beside the Father, not only because they would then be reunited but also because the life they shared would at last be shared with us. The Father then would have many sons, and daughters, too.

If at any time during Jesus' suffering, God had given any indication that He was displeased with what was happening, Satan would have put a quick end to it – but not out of compassion or a sense of justice. Satan had a self-serving motive for everything he did, and he would have gladly stopped men from killing Jesus if that is what it took to keep God happy. He still hoped to be promoted to sit on a throne with God in glory, and God allowed Satan to continue in that hope so that the crucifixion of His dear Son would not be interrupted.

God's perfect and terrifying patience determined everything.

SECTION 5: THE RESURRECTION

He is not here; he is risen.

Luke 24:6

WHEN THE SON SAT DOWN

I have emphasized repeatedly the importance of the event that took place in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. However, the event of supreme importance that day took place in heaven, not on earth. God's life being shared with men, as great as that was, was only the result of the greater event, which had just happened in heaven. The glorification of the Son to sit at the Father's right hand had to take place before the Spirit was given (Jn. 7:39), but even that was just one of the wonderful results of what was truly the most important event of all. *The event of supreme importance was the Father's acceptance of the Son's sacrifice when the Son returned home to heaven.*¹⁰⁶ Without the Father's acceptance, there would have been no glorification of the Son, no sitting at the Father's right hand, no outpouring of the Spirit, no purging of heaven, and no redemption for fallen man.

One popular modern plea to sinners, sounded forth by Christian ministers, is for sinners to "accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior!" But that statement makes no biblical sense. God has already accepted Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior, whether we like it or not. Besides, humans cannot accept the Son of God because the greater does the accepting, not the lesser. The only One who has ever accepted the Son is the Father, who alone is greater than he. And refusal to submit to God's ordination of His Son Jesus as our Lord and Savior is sin; it is rebellion against God. Before the Father accepted the Son's sacrifice in heaven, God's people,

¹⁰⁶ The Father's acceptance was proof that the Son was sinless, for blemished sacrifices were unacceptable to Him (e.g., Lev. 4:3).

Israel, had prayed to and answered to no one but God, but from that moment, they were required to submit to the Son if they wanted to remain in covenant with God. Jesus referred to this monumental change in the heavenly order when he prayed to the Father, “They were yours, and you have given them to me” (Jn. 17:6).

The glorification of the Son led to a restructuring of everything in heaven and *under* the earth, but not *on* it. Before God glorified Jesus, there was a mixture of good and evil everywhere. Wicked spirits mingled with good spirits in heaven, and wicked men and wicked spirits intermingled with good men and good spirits on earth. Even death did not put an end to the mixture of good and evil, for hell was populated with both the wicked and the righteous dead. The wicked dead were in the part of hell called “torment”, separated by an uncrossable, “wide gulf” from the righteous dead in the part of hell called “paradise”, though they could still see and converse with one another (Lk. 16:23–31). However, when Jesus sat down at God’s right hand, heaven was purged of all who were wicked when Satan and his angels were cast out (Heb. 9:18–23), and hell was purged of all who were good when paradise was moved up to heaven (Ps. 68:18; Eph. 4:8). Heaven now contains nothing but the righteous, and hell contains nothing but the wicked. But *on* the earth, nothing like that took place. This world remains a place where righteousness and wickedness dwell together, and that is why we needed Jesus to teach us the parable of the Wheat and the Tares.

Before the Son set heaven and hell in order, God loved His people too much to bring them up to heaven when they died. There was evil in heaven, and they had struggled enough against sin already here on earth. Instead, God kept them hidden in paradise, in the heart of the earth, within sight of the wicked but safe from them and from the flames. The glorified Son purged heaven of all who were evil in order to make it a fit place of rest for the righteous when they died, and he purged hell of all who were good in order to make it a fit place of torment for the wicked when they died. And in God’s time, the Son will provide God’s people with a new earth, where nothing but righteousness dwells (2Pet. 3:13).

SATAN CAST OUT

The sanctuary that Moses constructed at Mount Sinai was one of the most important Old Testament shadows. That tabernacle (and later, Solomon’s temple) was an earthly shadow of God’s heavenly tabernacle, where Christ now serves as our High Priest. And since the tabernacle was a holy place, sins committed within it brought about swift and severe punishments (e.g., Lev. 10:1–2; 2Chron. 26:16–20). One discerning brother, upon learning that God patiently tolerated evil in heaven for millennia, wondered how Moses’ tabernacle could represent heaven if sins committed in Moses’ tabernacle resulted in swift judgment from God. The answer is that God brought judgments upon transgressors in the tabernacle to foreshadow the Son’s purging of heaven, not to show how things were in heaven at Moses’ time. The tabernacle represented the place where the Son, not Aaron, would be High Priest.

Jesus once told his disciples that he saw Satan “fall like lightning out of heaven” (Lk. 10:18), but he must have seen it in a vision of things to come, for later, Jesus made it clear that Satan was not yet cast out (Jn. 12:31). This agrees with Paul’s teaching, that Jesus purged heaven of evil after he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven (Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:20). It also agrees with

the teaching found in Hebrews 9, where we are told that it was *after* Jesus ascended into the heavenly sanctuary that he purified it:

Hebrews 9

11. Christ, appearing *before God* as a high priest of good things to come, in a tabernacle greater and more perfect *than that of Moses*, not made by hands (that is, not of this world),
- 12a. neither with the blood of goats and oxen, but with his own blood, entered once for all into the sanctuary *of heaven*.
- . . .
23. It was necessary that the *earthly* figures of things in heaven be purified with these *sacrifices*, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

In Revelation, John also saw that after Jesus “was caught up to God and to His throne,”

Revelation 12

9. the great dragon was cast out, the ancient serpent, who is called the Accuser, and Satan, who deceives the entire world. He was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

That purging of heaven after the Son ascended was Judgment Day for heaven’s inhabitants, and it was the Son’s judgment that Satan and his angels faced. The Father had committed all judgment to the Son (Jn. 5:22), and until the Son was revealed, there was no judgment for Satan and his angels to face. They remained uncondemned and in God’s presence as long as the Son remained hidden. Peter warned the saints that “judgment begins at the house of God” (1Pet. 4:17), and it began with God’s house in heaven. And when that judgment was executed, Satan received from God the merciless judgment that he had so many times demanded for others.

Among faithful heavenly beings, there was great rejoicing when Satan and his angels fell “like lightning out of heaven” (Lk. 10:18). For them, heaven suddenly had a different, cleaner feeling, for there had been wickedness in their midst for thousands of years which they could feel, but could not understand until the Son was revealed. In their joy, however, their hearts went out to us, the inhabitants of earth, for the Accuser’s new home would be here.

Revelation 12

- 12b. Alas, earth and sea! For the Accuser has come down among you, having great anger, knowing that he has *just* a little time.

Those sympathetic creatures knew that, since the Son of God cast Satan and his angels down to earth instead of somewhere else, we would have to deal with the spirits that they had been dealing with for a long time. But with the parable of the Wheat and the Tares, Jesus let us know how the Father dealt with evil while it was in His presence, and with his own treatment of Judas, Jesus showed us how to follow the Father’s example.

Moreover, the Accuser being cast out of heaven does not mean that Satan has stopped accusing. “The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29), and Satan cannot cease from being what he was anointed to be, an Accuser of those who transgress. The critical

difference is that now he cannot make his accusations in heaven; he can only do his work on earth. Peter warned the children of God that Satan is wandering about the earth, “seeking whom he may devour” (1Pet. 5:8). The part of the anatomy that devours is the mouth, and it is with crafty talk that Satan turns both the world and unwise believers against God’s faithful servants. Satan and religious zealots like him, “thinking to do God service”, condemn those who do not follow them, in particular children of God who, like Jesus, walk instead in the light that exposes the hearts of men.

EVERYTHING RUINED

The moment God accepted His Son’s sacrifice and said to him, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool” (Ps. 110:1), Satan was confronted with the reality that God was not the kind of God that he had always thought He was and that his dream of a co-regency with God was forever ended. All of Satan’s labor, including his zealous prosecution of transgressors of God’s law and his efforts to maintain favor with God and the admiration of other heavenly beings, had been done with all his heart, but his heart was perverse. He had done everything out of love for himself, and he thought that God had been doing the same. Now, with Jesus on the throne which he thought was his, Satan could not have felt that he had been treated fairly. But then, what fool ever thinks that he has been treated fairly when his foolishness is exposed and he reaps what he has sown?

The resurrection and ascension of Jesus ruined everything, from Satan’s point of view, and Satan was furious, not afraid or ashamed, when he was cast out (Rev. 12:12). He knew that he had done everything God had ever told him to do, and had done it zealously. He saw himself as perfectly righteous. But God saw his heart, and He judged Satan according to His righteousness.

Righteous judgment seems right to a fool only when it is applied to someone else. Rather than humbling themselves and crying out to God for mercy, proud fools like Satan respond to God’s judgment by pitying themselves as victims of it. Then, seeing themselves as victims, they can justify very cruel acts of retaliation. Heaven’s former Prosecutor no doubt saw himself as misled, mistreated, and misunderstood. If he were a human, living in this modern American culture, he would probably bring a lawsuit against God for entrapment . . . and win.

What angers Satan most is something he can never understand; namely, the mysterious, sweet fellowship of the Father and the Son, the same fellowship they share now with those who “walk in the Spirit”. There is nothing Satan would not do to destroy the fellowship of the Father and His children. At the same time, there is nothing he *can* do to destroy it:

John 10

- 27. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me,
- 28. and I give them eternal life, and they will never, ever die, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.
- 29. My Father who gave me *all things* is greater than all, and no one can snatch *anything* out of my Father’s hand.

“TREASON! TREASON!”

What could Satan have thought when Jesus came back from the dead? He must have been thoroughly confused. It does not appear that he was afraid, however, for he did not flee from

heaven during the time that the resurrected Messiah walked on earth. Besides, he had seen others raised from the dead, and he did not know that Jesus was going to ascend into heaven where Satan was. No human had ever done that (Jn. 3:13)! If Satan and his angels had known that Jesus was going to ascend into heaven, and if they had known what was going to happen after he did, it is unlikely that they would have been hanging around heaven waiting for it to happen. But they *were* there in heaven when Jesus ascended, and they were still there when Jesus offered himself to the Father for our sins; otherwise, they could not have been there to be cast out (Rev. 12:7–9).

One can only imagine how Satan’s countenance fell when the resurrected Son of God, for the first time since creation, openly took his place at his Father’s right hand. Satan probably felt betrayed, the same way Queen Athaliah felt betrayed when God’s righteous high priest, Jehoiada, brought young Joash out of his hiding place in the temple. That murderous, wicked woman thought she had rid the earth of all of David’s descendants, but when she saw Joash standing there, wearing the crown, Athaliah indignantly tore her robes and screamed, “Treason! Treason!” as though *she* was the rightful ruler and a victim of wrongdoing. Likewise, Satan would have felt wronged when Jesus was glorified to sit at the Father’s right hand, for Satan had assumed for a very long time that God intended to bestow that honor upon him instead.

Earlier in this chapter, I suggested that in heaven, at some point, God engaged Satan in a conversation concerning how best to honor His chosen one, and that this conversation was foreshadowed by the Old Testament conversation between Persia’s King Ahasuerus and wicked Haman (Esth. 6:6–9). Wrongly assuming that the king had him in mind, Haman proposed several grandiose honors, which the king then bestowed upon Mordecai, whom Haman greatly despised. If God and Satan did have such a conversation, it would provide us with yet another justification for the book of Esther to be in the Bible. What a prophetic conversation between Haman and the Persian king!

Did God ask Satan to suggest honors to bestow on someone He especially wanted to honor, knowing that Satan would expect those honors to be his? And did Satan suggest that God exalt such a one “above the heavens”, and give him “a name above every name”, and grant him “all power in heaven and earth”, and command that “every knee should bow, and every tongue confess” that such a one was “Lord of all”? And did he suggest that God exalt that person so highly that there would be no access to God except through him and that no worship of God would be acceptable except it be in the name of that special, chosen one?

But alas, we are told nothing of such a conversation, and so we will deny our imagination any more of its pleasure for the time being.

A NEW PRIESTHOOD

The consecration ceremony for Aaron, Israel’s first high priest, was another Old Testament shadow of the Son. In the same way Aaron went through seven days of consecration in Moses’ tabernacle before he offered his first sacrifice (Lev. 8, 9),¹⁰⁷ Jesus went into heaven, God’s “true tabernacle” (Heb. 8:1–2), and spent seven days there being consecrated before he offered himself

¹⁰⁷ Aaron’s sons also had to be consecrated because Aaron was mortal, and so, someone would have to take over as high priest when he died.

to the Father for us.¹⁰⁸ At the end of that consecration week, the Son passed “through the veil” (Heb. 10:20) and began his ministry by offering himself for the sins of mankind.

At Mount Sinai, when God accepted Aaron’s first sacrifice, “fire went out from before the LORD, and it consumed the whole burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar. And all the people saw *it*, and they shouted and fell on their faces” (Lev. 9:24). But when God accepted His sinless Son’s sacrifice, God sent out a different kind of fire – the sweet, invisible fire of His Spirit – and it consumed the sins that lay on the altar of the disciples’ hearts. They, too, shouted and praised God, but not because they saw holy fire consuming the flesh of a dead animal. They shouted because the holy Spirit and fire was consuming *them*! David considered the animals that were consumed by fire on God’s altar to be blessed (Ps. 84:3). He never dreamed that a day was coming when humans would likewise be blessed to be consumed by an invisible fire from heaven and become “living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom. 12:1).

The kind of life that filled the followers of Jesus on the day of Pentecost was so superior to human life that it enabled them to “declare the mighty things of God” in languages they had never learned (Acts 2:1–11).¹⁰⁹ But speaking in unlearned languages was just the beginning. Nothing is impossible in God’s kind of life, which was now in Jesus’ disciples, for it is the life of the One who created the universe. The disciples also began performing miracles, as Jesus had told them they would do (Jn. 14:12; Mk. 16:17–18):

Acts 5

12a. Many signs and wonders were continually being done among the people through the hands of the apostles.

...

15. And the sick were carried out into the streets and were laid on beds or pallets so that when Peter came by, *his* shadow might fall on some of them.

16. And a multitude from the surrounding cities also came to Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those troubled by unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.

At the apostles’ touch, those who believed the gospel and repented were washed from their sins with a baptism in God’s holy life (Acts 8:14–17; 22:12–16). With a word from them, souls could be granted God’s life (Acts 10:44–47) and deceivers would fall down and die (Acts 5:1–11). But more importantly, the apostles after Pentecost grew in the knowledge of God. As Jesus had promised, the Spirit, now within them, began to guide them into all truth, reminding them of words Jesus had spoken (Jn. 14:26). “Then I remembered the word of the Lord” was

¹⁰⁸ There are fifty days from Passover to Pentecost. We can account for them all if we include a seven-day consecration period after Jesus’ ascension. Jesus was crucified at Passover. After that, he spent three days in the heart of the earth “preaching to the spirits in prison” (1Pet. 3:18–19). Then he rose from the dead and spent forty days here on earth, teaching his disciples (Acts 1:3). That makes forty-three days. Then, he ascended and spent seven days being consecrated in heaven to be a “high priest over the house of God” (Heb. 10:21), after which time (the same or next day) he made his eternal sacrifice for man’s sins and the life of God was poured out on men as proof of God’s acceptance of the sacrifice. That accounts for the fifty days between Passover and Pentecost. Questions remain as to when, exactly, Jesus was crucified, the fourteenth or the fifteenth of Nisan, but the information above fits the Old Testament pattern.

¹⁰⁹ For more on this subject, see my booklet, *Speaking in Tongues at Spirit Baptism*, available for online reading at GoingtoJesus.com.

undoubtedly said by the apostles in those days more than the single time it is recorded (Acts 11:16), and as they grew, they must have lived in a constant state of amazement.

The love for mankind that attended the grace shown at Pentecost was so deep and pure, and the mercy toward all humanity so completely undeserved, that for any human to refuse that love and grace is a damnable crime. John went so far as to say that whoever refused to believe in Jesus and his baptism of life, God's witness to His beloved Son, was calling God a liar:

1John 5

10. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness within himself; he who does not believe God has made Him *out to be* a liar because he has not believed in the witness that God has given concerning His Son.

On the other hand, wrote John, whoever humbles himself to receive Jesus' baptism of life has declared by his actions that God is true (Jn. 3:33).

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

On the day of Pentecost, the power of God's life completely re-created those who received it, and it still does; however, a fundamental purpose for God sharing His life with mankind was to provide proof of His acceptance of the Son's sacrifice. "The Spirit is the witness", John would write, "because the Spirit is truth" (1Jn. 5:6). No news reporters were in heaven, of course, when the Son offered himself to the Father as a sacrifice for man's sins. No cameras or microphones recorded that awesome, holy moment. According to the Old Testament shadow, when Israel's high priest went into the Holy of Holies to present the blood of sacrifice for the sins of the nation, no one, not even the other priests, were allowed in the tabernacle (Lev. 16:17). In the Son's case, even the holy creatures of heaven would have been barred from witnessing the event. Otherwise, the Spirit would not be *the* witness, as John said. It would only be one of many.¹¹⁰

The plethora of religions on earth makes it obvious that humans can be talked into believing almost anything about God. They can also become passionate about what they believe, as history's multitude of religion-based wars show. Throughout history, untold multitudes have given their lives and/or taken the lives of others because they passionately believed things about God that they had been taught. By receiving the life of God, however, those who believe in Jesus can *know* that the Jesus in whom they have believed is sitting at the right hand of God. People can sincerely believe that Jesus is Lord before they receive God's witness of that truth; indeed, they must do so (Heb. 11:6). Still, with just our own kind of life, we can never *know* that Jesus has been made "both Lord and Christ" and is sitting at the Father's right hand. This is why Paul taught that without the Spirit, no one can say (and know it to be true) that Jesus is Lord (1Cor. 12:3).

Jesus baptized my father with God's kind of life when he was a Freewill Baptist minister in 1925, and after he was expelled from that sect for receiving God's life, he served God with others who had received it until his death in 1989. He warned us that anything we believe can be a lie *as far as we know*. He exhorted the believers to whom he ministered to pursue the *knowledge* of God and not to be satisfied with merely believing what they had been told about

¹¹⁰ When it re-creates humans, the Spirit makes them witnesses, as Jesus said it would (Jn. 15:26-27). Still, human witnesses pass away. The Spirit of God is the only witness available to every generation.

Him, often quoting the apostle John, who said, “I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you might know” (1Jn. 5:13a). He stressed that a newly born child of God knows his heavenly Father no better than a newly born human knows his earthly father and that only by pursuing the knowledge of God *after* being born again do God’s children ever come to know Him. With God’s kind of life in them, however, newborn children of God can grow to know Him, even though some fail to do so. The apostles were grieved when those whom they brought into the kingdom of God did not “follow on to know the LORD” (Hos. 6:3; see 1Cor. 3:1–3; Gal. 4:19–20; Heb. 5:12–13), and they were thrilled whenever they did (3Jn. 1:4):

1 Corinthians 1

4. I thank my God always for you, for the grace of God which is given to you in Christ Jesus,
5. that in every way, you are enriched in him, in all speech and in all knowledge.

A COVENANT OF RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

Jesus’ parable of the Wheat and the Tares helps us understand that Satan was not cast out of heaven merely because he was wicked. Satan had fallen into wickedness thousands of years before he was cast out. God cast Satan out of heaven because a new covenant of “grace and truth” had replaced the law:

John 1

17. The law was given through Moses; then, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Paul said that the law of Moses had glory as long as it was in effect, but the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ surpassed the law’s glory to such an extent that the law was left with no glory at all (2Cor. 3:7–11). And when the law lost its glory, Satan lost his job as heaven’s Prosecutor of it. The Father’s love for His Son and for us eliminated Satan’s position. A prosecutor of the law was no longer needed because observance of the law was no longer the standard by which God’s people would be judged. Now, instead of a prosecutor in heaven, we have “an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1Jn. 2:1), and that change makes this a far better covenant, “established upon better promises” (Heb. 8:6). We are still governed by a law, but it is “the perfect law of liberty” (Jas. 1:25), which means that we believers are now judged by what the Son has set us free to do; namely, to live God’s kind of life. This covenant is a covenant of the heart, which only God can judge, for only He knows “the thoughts and deliberations” of our hearts (Heb. 4:12).

As long as he was heaven’s Prosecutor, Satan’s standard for executing God’s judgments was how well God’s people observed the rites and rules of the law. Proper form was crucial to Satan because proper form provided him a standard by which he could make judgments, but the external standard of “commandments contained in ordinances” is what Jesus abolished on the cross (Eph. 2:14–15; Col. 2:14–15), and when he did away with handwritten rules and rites, he rendered Satan useless as a prosecutor of God’s people. Isaiah foretold of the day when the Son would come and reign, but would not judge anyone or anything by appearances:

Isaiah 11

2. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD,
3. and He shall make him discerning in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what his eyes see, nor will he make decisions by what his ears hear.

If we judge by what we see and hear instead of being led by the Spirit, we will make judgments based on what pleases the eye or the ear, as Eve did in the garden of Eden. With our own kind of life, it is impossible to do anything else. To judge anything in this world on the basis of what can be seen or heard is to judge on the basis of form, not substance. But God sees what is behind the mask. As He once told the prophet Samuel, “The LORD does not see as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1Sam. 16:7b). The eye or the ear cannot tell us the condition of someone’s heart. Physical beauty is not a fruit of the Spirit. Musical talent, intelligence, earthly status, technical skill, and wealth are not fruits of the Spirit. No earthly condition is a fruit of the Spirit, and for that reason, no judgment that is based on any of those things is sure. But that is the only kind of judgment that Satan, or humans without God’s life, can make.

Jesus condemned the leaders of Israel because they, like Satan, made judgments based on appearances (Jn. 8:15), and he commanded his followers not to do that (Mt. 7:1), telling them to make “righteous judgment” instead (Jn. 7:24). Righteous judgment is never wrong, for it comes from God’s kind of life. When Jesus told people they should make righteous judgment, he knew that no one could do so because no one yet had God’s life. But he also knew that he had come to die so that they could have it, and that the time for his death was not far away.

The Scriptures tell us that God is love. That means, in part, that God would much rather show us mercy and enjoy fellowship with us than to sit on His throne and watch us perform ceremonies:

Hosea 6 (cp. Mt. 9:13)

6. I desire mercy and not sacrifice [a ceremony], and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings [ceremonies].

Jesus told the elders of Israel that if they understood that one statement from Hosea, they would never again misjudge or condemn an innocent soul (Mt. 12:7). Satan’s ignorance of the meaning of that verse is the reason he never understood why God called His seat in the Most Holy the “mercy seat”. Had it been up to Satan, he would have called it the “judgment seat” instead.

EVERYTHING MADE RIGHT

Since the day Jesus purged heaven of all evil, every creature who is in heaven has been working *for* us. No one in God’s presence is against us or feels superior to us who are His children, and the task of the angels who were not cast out with Satan is only to minister to us for good (Heb. 1:14; Mt. 18:10). Jesus does not accuse us to the Father or demand stern justice against us when we fall. On the contrary, he has great compassion (Jas. 5:11) and intercedes for us (Heb. 7:25) because he knows what it is like to be one of us living in this wicked world. God

and His Son love us very much, and every creature who does not feel compassion for us has been forever cast out of God's presence.

Hebrews 4

14. Having, therefore, a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.
15. For we do not have a high priest who cannot be touched by our frailties, but he has been tempted in every way that we are, yet without sin.
16. Let us, then, boldly draw near to the throne of grace, that we might receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

The present state of things everywhere has been arranged and is maintained by the power, and wisdom, and goodness of the Son. When Paul said, "All things are held together by him" (Col. 1:17), Paul really meant *all* things, not just the universe that we can see. And Peter was just as inclusive in his meaning when he declared to Cornelius and his household that Jesus "is Lord of all" (Acts 10:36). Jesus Christ is Lord of everything and everybody, visible and invisible, good and evil, living and dead, in heaven, on earth, and beneath the earth. And even though the glorified Son of God changed so many things after he ascended into heaven, he is not finished. He is preserving this new order in its present state only until the time appointed by the Father for him to make even greater changes than these. The Son, the living Word of God, created these heavens and the earth, "and by the same Word, the heavens and the earth which exist now are being kept in store, reserved for fire until the Day of Judgment and the destruction of ungodly men" (2Pet. 3:7).

The first time the Son came, he set things aright everywhere except here, where we live. When he comes the second time, he will reign over this wicked world for a thousand years, and then set things aright everywhere.





Chapter 8

The Revelation of the Father

We know that the Son of God has come
and has given us understanding
so that we might know Him who is true,
and in His Son Jesus Christ, we are in Him who is true.
This is the true God and eternal life.
1John 5:20

“NO ONE KNOWS THE FATHER”

Simply believing in God will save no one. James pointed out that even the demons believe in God (Jas. 2:19). This whole world, the same “whole world” that John said is deceived (Rev. 12:9), claims to believe in and to worship God. But to this whole world, Jesus would say, as he said to the Samaritan woman, “You do not know what you are worshipping.” The apostles’ mission was not to convince people to believe in and worship God. Rather, their mission was to introduce them to the Son, who would then sanctify them and make their worship acceptable to the God they *thought* they were worshipping (Rom. 15:16). At Mars’ Hill in Athens, Paul noted the Athenians’ extremely religious mind-set (Acts 17:22), but his message to them was that all their worship was in vain because it had nothing to do with God’s Son.

The world has always worshipped, for in this world, men honor “many gods and many lords” (1Cor. 8:5), but one of the more unsavory truths found in the Bible is that the gods whom people of this world worship are demons (Dt. 32:17; Ps. 106:37; 1Cor. 10:20). When the Son was revealed, the Father was revealed through him; still, for the most part, the world remains in unbelief and continues to worship as it has always done – in vain.

God created the Son so much like Himself that as we learn about the Son, we learn about the Father, even if the Father is not mentioned. We can no more write a chapter about the true God without reference to His Son than we can write about the sun in the sky without reference to its light and heat. The sun is more than the light and heat it produces, but without the light and heat, we would not even exist to know there is a sun. Likewise, the Father is more than the Son He produced, but without the Son, we would not exist to know there is a Father. “No one”, Jesus declared, “comes to the Father but by me” (Jn. 14:6). In other words, we cannot even look at the sun to learn about it without its light and heat showing us where in the sky to look. Jesus said, “No one really knows the Son except the Father, and no one really knows the Father except the

Son, and him to whom the Son will reveal *Him*” (Mt. 11:27). It was unheard-of for a man to claim that he alone knew God and that no one else could know God unless he allowed it, but Jesus made that claim, and it was true.

Without the Son, there can be no knowledge of God, no fellowship with God, no kinship with God, and no love for God *as He really is*. As much as people everywhere talked about God before the Son was revealed, not one of them knew Him. Even the Jews did not know God, though He had entered into a covenant with them. Otherwise, they would have recognized His Son, since the Son is the perfect reflection of God.

SUPREME HUMILITY

In God’s kind of life, as we saw in Job’s story, is a kind of humility that is beyond human experience and imagination. It is a humility that seeks the blessing of those over whom it reigns, and loves them more than it loves itself. This paradoxical element of God’s character, supreme humility with supreme power, was particularly out of step with the ancient world’s concept of greatness. Paul is often quoted as saying, “The love of money is *the* root of all evils” (1Tim. 6:10), but that is not precisely what he wrote. His actual statement was, “The love of money is *a* root of all evils.” Other roots of evil exist, as Paul well knew, and perhaps the deadliest of them is the desire for worldly fame and honor.

In much of the ancient world, to covet worldly honor was not considered evil. On the contrary, the pursuit of worldly honor was considered laudable.¹¹¹ Some highly regarded figures in antiquity, both mythological and real, were comforted in their deaths by knowing they had secured lasting fame for themselves.¹¹² This passion for earthly praise became so basic to certain cultures of the ancient world that by the time of Jesus, even Israel’s rulers had been taken in by it (Jn. 12:42–43). God’s kind of humility and love for the poor and downtrodden simply did not exist on earth. The Son brought that into the world. Deeds performed by the wealthy at that time which we would consider as charitable were inspired not by humility and compassion for the poor but by self-love and the desire for worldly honor.¹¹³ The wealthy performed deeds of generosity, but only to secure earthly fame. Jesus warned his disciples not to be that way:

¹¹¹ Consider the epitaph found on the tomb of Agreophon, an ancient Roman nobleman. Among his other laudable qualities was this: “Ever since he was a boy and ephebe, Agreophon has shown *his love of honour* [emphasis mine]” (Zuiderhoek, pp. 124–125).

The same book (p. 126) quotes a “decree of the council and people of Kyme . . . in honour of the benefactor L. Vaccius Labeo that was set up somewhere between 2 BC and AD 14: ‘Labeo, who is worthy of all honours, should further be praised for his dignified way of life, *his love of fame* [emphasis mine], and his attitude of liberality towards the city, and he should be held in the highest esteem and be most highly appreciated.’”

¹¹² Given the choice between a long life without fame and a short life with everlasting fame, Achilles chose to die young (Homer, *The Iliad*, 9.410–416). Centuries after Homer, the same sentiment was expressed by the philosopher Heraclitus when he said, “The best men choose one thing rather than all else: everlasting fame among mortal men” (Freeman, p. 26).

¹¹³ In classical society, the rich were expected to demonstrate their virtue by funding public works such as temples, baths, public games, etc., thus increasing their city’s stature (and with it, their own). This system of patronage was not inspired by concern for the poor; the patron would be lauded for his benefactions to the people or to the city, not the poor. See Footnote 95, page 275.

Matthew 6

1. Beware that you do not do your alms before men, to be seen by them; otherwise, you have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.
2. When you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and streets so that they might be honored by men. Truly, I tell you, they have their reward.

In our culture, flagrant ambition for glory is widely considered now to be disgraceful, but that is only because of the influence of the gospel of the meek Son of God. The sinful nature of humans has not changed; humans still covet and pursue earthly glory, but the influence of the gospel has made them ashamed of doing so.¹¹⁴ Far from pursuing his own glory, the Son, with a heart like God's, humbled himself and surrendered his life for the sake of others, and Paul exhorted us to do the same:

Philippians 2

5. Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus,
6. who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped after.
7. Instead, he emptied himself, assuming the form of a slave, made in the likeness of men.
8. And being found as a man in appearance, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death – the death of a cross.

How very strange it must have sounded to the ancient ear for Jesus to say, “I do not accept honor from men” (Jn. 5:41). People of Jesus’ time, upon hearing that, would have wondered what Jesus wanted out of life if not worldly honor. *Was Jesus even sane?* As we have seen, even his earthly relatives did not think so (Mk. 3:21, 31–35).

The flesh’s lust for fame also played a part in the Temptation when Satan suggested that Jesus throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple (Mt. 4:5–6). Satan was not suggesting to Jesus that he commit suicide. He knew the angels would save Jesus if he jumped. What he wanted was for Jesus to put his specialness to God on display in order to gain the admiration of men. And Satan was not the only one who thought Jesus ought to pursue worldly honor. Jesus’ siblings also thought he should pursue it:

John 7

3. His brothers said to him, “Leave this place and go to Judea so that your disciples may also see the works that you do.
4. Nobody does anything in secret if he wants to be known. Since you do these things, show yourself to the world!”

Jesus’ brothers were right about one thing: those who desire fame do not do their good deeds in secret. But they did not understand that the reason the Son of God did good deeds was to

¹¹⁴ Herman Melville, the famous American novelist, described the desire for earthly glory as “the most secret of all passions” (*Billy Budd*, Chapter 28). But that desire became shameful and secret only because the Son of God came and revealed that the desire for earthly glory is bad.

please his Father and to reveal his Father's love for people (Ps. 40:7), not to gain human admiration.

None of Jesus' disciples, especially Judas, whose heart was most like Satan's, could have believed that Jesus would really submit to being arrested if he was forced to make a choice. Judas, who unquestionably desired earthly gain (Jn. 12:4–6), no doubt expected Jesus to resort to the use of his miracle-working power in order to escape a disgraceful death. No doubt, all of Jesus' disciples would have expected Jesus to do that. A disgraceful death was the very opposite of earthly fame and glory, and all the disciples coveted those things. Several times, they quarreled about who among them should be the greatest in the kingdom that they thought Jesus was about to establish on earth (Mt. 18:1; Mk. 9:33–34). They were quarreling about that even during the Last Supper (Lk. 22:24).

None of Jesus' disciples could conceive of a sane man willingly submitting to public disgrace and an ignominious death. Judas probably did not want Jesus dead any more than the other disciples did. What they all wanted Jesus to do was to become a king and to reign in spectacular glory on earth because they expected to reign with him. The mother of James and John even came to Jesus to ask that her sons be given seats next to him in his kingdom (Mt. 20:20–21). The disciples probably used many ploys to maneuver themselves into Jesus' favor so that he would grant them high positions in the kingdom they expected him to establish. Jesus' teaching, in particular that the kingdom of God was spiritual (Lk. 17:21), did not fall on ears that were deaf; they fell on ears that were dead to the ways of God.

LAST-DITCH EFFORT

It must have stunned Judas in the garden to see Jesus meekly submit to the men who came to arrest him. He would have expected Jesus to use his mighty power to show himself to the world and escape the cruelty and disgrace that was coming. Appalled at this turn of events and in a desperate effort to undo what he had done, Judas returned to the priests who had hired him and begged them to take back their money. But the priests mocked Judas' fear. Judas, knowing that there was no one left in heaven or earth to help him, hurled the blood money down on the floor of the temple and "went and hanged himself" (Mt. 27:5).

Was Judas' betrayal a last-ditch effort by Satan to force Jesus to accept the position of god of this world by putting Jesus in a position in which he had to choose between a disgraceful, agonizing death and supreme earthly fame and authority? If so, then the choice to die would be Jesus' alone, and Satan could then return to heaven with the appearance of having done all that he could do to save the Messiah. What this amounts to is that Satan threatened the Messiah with torture and death if he did not accept God's offer to be king of the world. If Jesus did not yield under those conditions, then torture and death is all that was left for him.

In dark Gethsemane, while Jesus' disciples slept, was Satan watching when Jesus fell on his face and cried out, "O my Father! If it is possible, let this cup pass from me" (Mt. 26:39)? And did he hear Jesus tell Peter that his Father was ready to send twelve legions of angels to rescue him (Mt. 26:53)? If so, Satan must have wondered if the pressure was finally getting to Jesus. During the years of Jesus' ministry, Satan had heard Jesus speak on a number of occasions about having to die (e.g., Mt. 16:21; 20:28; Lk. 18:31–33). He would have remembered that on those occasions, Jesus was not weeping and crying out to his Father for a way of escape. But now,

with death at his doorstep, Jesus' resolve seemed to be crumbling, which, to Satan, might have been an encouraging sign. He may well have thought that Jesus was finally becoming willing to use his power to do such things as turn stones into bread, or hurl himself from the pinnacle of the temple, or fly, or something else that would dazzle men and win Jesus great glory on earth, as both Satan and those who loved Jesus wanted him to do.

LIKE THE FATHER

Jesus turned down the glory that Satan, Judas, and Jesus' disciples wanted him to pursue. The Father had never sought glory for Himself, and in the garden, the Son chose to die rather than to cease from being like Him. The love that motivated Jesus to make that choice was the Father's love for us. The Father Himself could not die (1Tim. 1:17). If He could have died for us, He would have. What Jesus said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father," applies even to what men saw Jesus do at Calvary. Jesus prayed for those who were killing him, but he prayed that prayer only because he was like his Father.

The Father loved mankind so much that when He poured out His life on the day of Pentecost, it was offered even to the murderers of His beloved Son – if they would only humble themselves to the one they had just killed. Peter delivered to them God's incredibly merciful and generous offer:

Acts 3

13. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His child Jesus, whom you handed over to *the Gentiles*, and you repudiated him before Pilate when he was determined to release *him*.
14. But you denied the holy and righteous one, and asked for a man – a murderer! – to be granted to you *instead*,
15. and you killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses!
- ...
19. Repent, then, and be converted, that your sins might be blotted out!

Before the Son came, men everywhere were saying that God is good. But only when we see the mercy that God extended to the very ones who denounced and killed His Son can we understand how little we really know about the goodness of God. Without the Son, without his wondrous story, none of us could have believed that a God with that kind of love exists.

Jesus knew that no one can seek glory from God and from men at the same time. He asked the unbelieving elders of Israel, "How can you believe, while receiving honor from one another and not seeking the honor that comes from God alone?" (Jn. 5:44). At a time when the whole world saw little if any difference between those two kinds of honor, Jesus, like his heavenly Father, had no desire for the honor that was of earth (Jn. 5:41). Those whose hearts were given to the spirit of the time could not believe in a man like Jesus. His humble attitude and selflessness would have seemed extraordinarily wrong-headed to most people. They could not have understood that when the Son said, "I am meek and lowly in heart" (Mt. 11:29), he was revealing something wonderful about God. It is the Son as the living expression of the Father's supreme humility that makes it possible for us to believe, in a world like this one, that the

greatest One of all is also the humblest One of all. It took Jesus to make Isaiah's description of the Almighty real to us:

Isaiah 57

15. Thus says the high and exalted One who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy: "I dwell in a high and holy place and with the humbled and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirits of the lowly and to revive the hearts of the oppressed."

The Son knew that the Father could have justly demanded all glory for Himself, and he learned meekness by imitating what he saw in his Father. He saw his Father send rain and sunshine upon both the good and the evil – and ask nothing in return. The Father just loved, and moved on. Whether or not humans loved God in return, He continued to bless them because He is by nature good, and the Son followed his humble Father's example:

John 5

19. Jesus answered and said to them, "Truly, truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but only what he sees the Father do; for whatever things He does, these things the Son also does, and in the same way."

HONORING THE SON AS GOD

One of Jesus' most astonishing revelations was that it is the Father's will for all creatures not just to honor His Son but to honor His Son *as God*. He said,

John 5

22. The Father doesn't even judge anyone, but has committed all judgment to the Son
23. so that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son [just as he honors the Father] does not honor the Father who sent him.

In the New Testament, we find the Son's name appearing many times where "God" would normally be. "The gospel of God" is also referred to as "the gospel of Christ" (Rom. 15:16; 1:16); "the day of God" is called in another place "the day of Christ" (2Pet. 3:12; Phip. 1:10); "the Spirit of God" is called "the Spirit of Christ" (Rom. 8:9); "the doctrine of God" is called "the doctrine of Christ" (Tit. 2:10; Heb. 6:1); "the grace of God" is called "the grace of Christ" (Acts 11:23; Gal. 1:6); "the law of God" is called "the law of Christ" (Rom. 7:22; Gal. 6:2); "the truth of God" is called "the truth of Christ" (Rom. 15:8; 2Cor. 11:10); "the Assemblies of God" are called "the Assemblies of Christ" (1Cor. 11:16; Rom. 16:16); "the ministers of God" are called "ministers of Christ" (2Cor. 6:4; 1Cor. 4:1); and others.¹¹⁵

Before the Son was revealed, such a thing was unthinkable. But because the Father desires that men honor His Son as God, it was not blasphemy for Paul and the other apostles to use the

¹¹⁵ For instance, "the mystery of God/Christ" (Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:4), "the love of God/Christ" (Rom. 5:5; 8:35), "the knowledge of God/Christ" (2Pet. 1:2; Phip. 3:8), and "the word of God/Christ" (Acts 4:31; Col. 3:16).

name of the Son alone when speaking of eternal, holy things. This was the most unexpected development in the history of salvation.

“BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST”

Perhaps the most incredible of all the expressions of the Father’s humility is that in this covenant, in order for a sinner to be forgiven and cleansed from sin, the Father requires only that the sinner honor His Son as God. The Father receives into His eternal kingdom anyone who honors His Son as God, regardless of what that person believes about the Father as a person. They may be Trinitarians, believing that the Father is part of a triune God, the first of three equal persons of a Holy Trinity. Or they may be of the Oneness faith, believing that the Son is himself wholly the Father. Or they may understand the truth of the matter, that there is a Father in heaven with His Son sitting at His right hand. None of those beliefs seem to matter to God at all, as far as forgiveness of sin is concerned, so long as His Son is honored as God. In every culture around the world, people who repent and honor the Son as God may receive the Son’s baptism of life, while others who do not honor the Son as God are not granted that grace – regardless of how highly they speak of God.

Many Greek texts have 1John 2:23b: “He who confesses the Son has the Father also.” But significantly, no verse anywhere states the opposite; that is, “He who confesses the Father has the Son also.” “Whosoever will” may come to the Son without acknowledging the Father; however, no one may come to the Father without acknowledging the Son. As John said, “Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father” (1Jn. 2:23a). John also wrote, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life” (Jn. 3:36a), but what is astonishing is that John did not write, “He who believes in *God* has eternal life.” In Philippians 3:8, Paul demonstrated the same faith when he said that he counted everything in this life as garbage, just to know Christ. Paul did not say “just to know God”, and Paul was free to say what he did because he understood that to know Christ *is* to know God.

When the terrified Philippian jailer ran into the prison and begged Paul to tell him how to be saved from the wrath of God, Paul said to him, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your house” (Acts 16:31). There was no mention of God in Paul’s reply. After this, when Paul went to the jailer’s house and preached the gospel (Acts 16:32–34), Paul would certainly have told him the whole story, but Paul’s answer to him that night in the prison was all that the jailer needed to know in order to be saved. Neither Paul nor any other apostle ever taught that those who confess faith in God will be saved, but only those who confess “Lord Jesus” (Rom. 10:9). Paul was not saying that God does not count; he was saying that God is so incredibly humble that He does not count Himself.

How could our heavenly Father possibly be any humbler and less demanding than that? It was impossible for man to imagine a God so meek that He would forgive the worst of sinners if only they would honor somebody else. That kind of humility and love is so far beyond the expectation of humans that it confused and challenged the very best of them when it was revealed. And it was revealed in Jesus. If in this book, we were never to mention God or the Father, but spoke only of the Son, we would still be talking about the Father because the Son is His exact representation. It would be foolish, of course, to intentionally avoid the mention of God, for He is there. He is the Father of His Son, Jesus Christ, and He is wonderful. We *want* to

speak of His wonderful works, and we *want* to extol and serve Him acceptably. Nevertheless, were we to speak only of the Son and omit all mention of God or the Father, this book would still be about Him, whether we knew it or not.

The Son warned men that “he who hates me, hates my Father also” (Jn. 15:23). But it is also true that whoever *loves* Jesus loves the Father *even if he does not believe that the Father exists in heaven as a separate person from the Son*. If the many who believe in Jesus but do not know there is a Father *and* a Son are judged worthy to be raised with the righteous dead when Jesus returns, then the Son whom they have loved will present them to his Father (1Cor. 15:24–28), and they will love Him, too, even if they are surprised to meet Him.¹¹⁶

Solomon declared that “there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl. 1:9), but centuries after Solomon, God promised to do a new thing (Isa. 43:19), and in revealing His Son, He did it, putting to shame even the wisdom that He had given to Solomon. The possibility of salvation in the name of Jesus without mentioning the Father, or even believing in Him as a separate being from the Son, was an element of the “new thing” that God promised, and without grace from God, even Jesus’ disciples could not have believed it.

To honor the Son as God does not mean that we honor God less. On the contrary, honoring the Son as God is the only way that we can honor God at all, for God made His Son “the way [to God], the truth [about God], and the life [of God]” (Jn. 14:6). Paul said that in the end, it would be “to the glory of God” that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (Phip. 2:10–11). Far from being provoked to jealousy, God is glorified when people humble themselves to His Son. This is true, if for no other reason, because at the close of this age, the Son will bow to the Father and present himself and his followers to Him:

1Corinthians 15

24a. Then *comes* the end, when he will hand over the kingdom to *his* God, and Father.

...

28. And when all things are subdued under him [the Son], then shall the Son submit himself to Him who subdued all things under him, that God might be all things to all people.

The Father and the Son do not compete for praise or glory. The Father has given it all to His Son, and the Son, being like his Father, gives it all back to Him.

TWO DOCTRINES

Jesus is the only person in the New Testament books who told others to “have faith in God” (Mk. 11:22). Paul omitted mention of God repeatedly when he spoke of having faith (Eph. 1:15; Col. 1:4; 2:5); however, Paul was not exhorting men to have faith in Jesus instead of God. Rather, he was teaching them to have faith in Jesus as God’s Son. In time, as believers began to struggle to understand how the apostles could have spoken of Christ Jesus as they did if he were not in some way God Himself, many believers drifted into one of two camps, either the Holy

¹¹⁶ This assumes that in the Final Judgment, God will receive into His kingdom those who deny the existence of the Father *and* the Son, but I admit that the apostle John casts some doubt on that assumption (1Jn. 2:22b).

Trinity or the Oneness doctrine. What the originators of those doctrines failed to comprehend is that the apostles honored the Son as God not because Christ was equal in any respect with the Father but simply because it was the Father's will that men honor His Son that way.

Before the apostle John died, it came to his attention that a doctrine had emerged (whether Trinitarian or Oneness in nature we are not told) that denied the Father *and* the Son. John was clearly troubled. He responded by strictly warning his children in the Lord to refuse such doctrines:

1John 2

- 22b. He is the antichrist, who denies the Father and the Son.
- 23. Everyone who denies the Son does not have the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also.¹¹⁷
- 24. As for you, let what you have heard from the beginning continue in you. If what you have heard from the beginning continues in you, then you will continue in the Son and in the Father.

GOD'S HUMILITY SAVED MANY

The truth was condemned, along with the Oneness doctrine, and Trinitarianism was imposed upon civilization when those who believed in the Trinity joined forces with the Roman Empire. But God was prepared. His love for people and His supreme humility made it possible for sincere souls to be saved in spite of the darkness that the Empire forced upon them. They needed only to honor the Son as God. If God had required belief in Him as a separate person from the Son in order to receive eternal life, very few would have been saved because very few could have resisted the might of the Roman Empire, now in the form of the Roman Catholic Church.

Jesus commanded his disciples to do whatever the scribes and Pharisees told them to do but not to live the way they lived (Mt. 23:2–3). Every one of his disciples who then obeyed those religious leaders but did not live as they lived found favor with God. Jesus' wise counsel served many a soul well after the gospel was transformed by Rome into a new religious system called "Christianity". Over the past two millennia, many honored Jesus as God, as the leaders of that new religion told them to do, but they did not live the way those religious leaders lived. In doing so, they found favor with God. Seeing what the Empire, Christianity, did to those who openly denied its doctrine of a Holy Trinity, people acquiesced to it, but in doing so, they were honoring the Son as God, and the Father blessed them for it. Thus, God's humility, His willingness to forgive the sin of those who simply honored His Son as God, saved many in spite of the Empire's heavy-handed perversion of the gospel.¹¹⁸

MOST BLESSED, FOREVER

Even though much is revealed about God by the revelation that He chose to begin creation with a Son, it is the revelation of the *kind* of Son that God created which makes that revelation of God complete. The Son was created with such majesty that the heavens themselves cannot

¹¹⁷ The last half of this verse is from the UBS Greek text and is included in most translations of the New Testament.

¹¹⁸ The enforcement began in earnest after the church's First Ecumenical Council, which was convened and presided over by the Roman Emperor Constantine, at Nicaea in AD 325.

contain it. With the poor instrument of human language, the apostles struggled to adequately describe the glory given to the Son:

Hebrews 7

26. It was fitting that we should have such a high priest – holy, innocent, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.

Philippians 2

9. God has highly exalted him and bestowed upon him a name that is above every name,
10. that at the name of Jesus every knee belonging to heavenly beings should bow, as well as earthly beings, and those under the earth,
11. and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

There cannot possibly be a greater goodness, a more selfless act, than God giving to His Son “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Mt. 28:18; cp. Jn. 3:35). When Jesus told his disciples that all authority in heaven and earth had been given to him, he was not boasting. He was telling them how good God had been to him. When the Father created the Son, He gave the Son everything except immediate recognition, and He withheld that only to give His Son even greater glory “in the fullness of time”.

It pleased the Father to bless the Son with every blessing and to make the Son “most blessed, forever”. The Father’s happiness was to make the Son happy, and His Son was made very happy indeed:

Psalms 21

1. The king [Jesus] rejoices in your strength, O LORD! And in your salvation, how greatly he rejoices!
2. You have given him his heart’s desire, and you have not withheld the request of his lips. Selah.
3. For you will meet him [after Jesus ascended into heaven] with blessings of goodness; you will set upon his head a crown of pure gold.
4. He asked life from you; you gave him length of days forever and ever.
5. His glory *will be* great in your salvation; you will bestow upon him majesty and honor.
6. For you will make him most blessed, forever; you have made him happy with the joy of your face.
7. For the king trusts in the LORD, and through the lovingkindness of the Most High, he will not be moved.

The Son will never be moved from his honored place beside the Father, and his kingdom will never end (Dan. 2:44; 7:13–14).

When the Son was first created, he found himself covered with God’s greatest blessings and glory. He felt loved and wanted. Jesus tried to pass along to his disciples his sense of being loved and wanted by telling them, “Do not be afraid, my little flock; your Father is very pleased to give you the kingdom” (Lk. 12:32). But at the time, his disciples did not even know what the

kingdom of God was or how God planned to give it to them. Jesus was telling his perplexed disciples that it would make the Father very happy to share with them His kind of life and to bring them into His family. And though the Bible does not explicitly say so, we can be sure that when the disciples entered into God's kingdom on Pentecost morning, the happiest participant in that event was the Father Himself. Since He was in heaven, His great joy is not recorded in the Bible the way the ecstatic joy of the disciples is recorded. Overwhelmed with the power of God's kind of life, they staggered down from the upper room where they had gathered, into the streets of Jerusalem, drunk with joy and proclaiming God's greatness in languages they did not understand (Acts 2:4). But the Father in heaven was having a glorious time as well. In fact, it was His joy that those disciples were feeling.

HOLY LOVE

As we saw in previous chapters, the Son spoke through the prophets many times about his hidden life with his Father. But there is something especially charming about the following instance from Isaiah, in which the Son describes himself as an arrow that was hidden in heaven among other arrows in God's quiver, waiting for his turn to be taken out and sent by God on his appointed mission:

Isaiah 49

2b. He made me a polished arrow; in His quiver, He has hidden me.

When that hidden arrow struck its target, it moved heaven and earth, and the holy love of God poured out upon fallen man, for the arrow's target was the Father's own heart! That is what was opened by the Son's suffering and death.

As I have said, the central message of the gospel is that God is a Father. And only an unspeakably profound love for us could have moved the Father to send His beloved Son into this dangerous world to rescue us who knew nothing about Him. But "God so loved the world that He gave up His only begotten Son so that all who believe in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16). The Son's self-sacrifice for our sins tells us that the Father loves us more than He loves Himself, for that is what the Son did, who is the image of the Father. This is what makes the story of the gospel altogether a story of love.

SIMPLE AND AVAILABLE

The revelation of the Son showed us the way of escape from vain intellectualizing about an unknowable, remote God. Without the Spirit of Christ, the best that any of us can do is to pontificate about how incomprehensibly great God is. But such theological blather lures us "away from the simplicity that is in Christ" and into the realm of philosophy, which is a corrupting influence on the faith (Col. 2:8). What draws us back from the brink is the Lamb of God. Jesus Christ was real, not an idea. He stood where we stand, he felt what we feel, and he showed us how to live God's kind of life in this sinful world. He came to show us that God is more than incomprehensibly great. He showed us that God is so great that He can make Himself simple and available, that God is so great that He *can* be known, and that He makes Himself known to every humble heart that believes in His Son.

It is the tendency of our nature to stress God's inaccessibility. Eloquent expostulations about God's "unsearchable ways" may sound impressive but can deliver no one from the darkness of sin and death. If we teach that nobody can ever really know God, then what are we teaching except that no one has been sent by God to show people the way? Paul said that faith comes by hearing (Rom. 10:14–17), but if nobody knows God, then to whom can people listen so that they might have faith? The doctrine that God is unknown and unknowable sterilizes the ground out of which faith should arise by poisoning the hearts of men with wrong ideas.

To believe in Christ is to believe that the Father is so good and so great that He has made Himself known. Unbelief is the refusal to believe that God is that good and that great. We must not be content to speak of God as extraordinarily great and just let it go at that, though to do so is what our fleshly nature wants. The pride that is in man's flesh is such that many people choose to die rather than to believe the simple gospel of Christ, to receive God's free gift of life, and to experience His goodness and greatness for themselves.

What love the Father had for us, to transform us desperately sinful creatures into saints and to re-create us as His children, worthy to live forever! How great and good God is, to make us worthy to stand before Him "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Eph. 5:27) and to call us "out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1Pet. 2:9). We were "dead in trespasses and sins", but God sent His Son to give us life so that we might know Him – and by revealing Himself through His Son, God accomplished the impossible in us.



Part 3

Life in the Father and the Son



Chapter 9

Government

A child is born for us. To us, a son is given.
And the government shall be on his shoulder.

Isaiah 9:6a

Let every soul be subject to the higher powers,
for there is no power but of God;
the powers that exist are ordained by God.
Therefore, he who opposes the power
is resisting the ordinance of God,
and they who resist will receive to themselves damnation.

Romans 13:1–2

RELATIONSHIPS

David wrote, “All that the LORD pleased, He did in heaven, and on earth, in the seas, and all deep places” (Ps. 135:6). And according to Paul, we can learn much about God by paying attention to what He was pleased to do:

Romans 1

20a. From the creation of the world, His invisible attributes (namely, His eternal power and divine nature) have been clearly seen, being understood through the things that are made.

If we can learn about God from what He did in creation, then what does it tell us about God that the first thing He created was someone to love? If in creation, God did only and exactly what He wanted to do, then His creation of a Son *before anything else* must mean that God wanted most of all to have someone with Him, someone with whom to share His life. God could have created everything without a Son, of course, but that is not what He did. He wanted a Son to create everything, and so, He created the Son and then honored him with all power, and hid within that Son “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”.

It can hardly be overemphasized that *God is, first of all, a God of relationships*. The revelation that from the beginning there existed a beloved Son – not as an idea but as a living being separate from the Father – lets us know that above all else, God desires loving relationships. That desire lies at the heart of everything God has ever done. Nothing in creation

contradicts that truth, and nothing confirms it so conclusively as does God's choice to begin creation by creating someone to love, and then to love that person so much that He gave him everything. When John wrote, "God is love", he put into words the meaning of God's choice to create a Son before anything else. And to say that God is love is just another way of saying that God is a God of relationships, for love always has an object. Actually, John's powerful, simple statement, "God is love", seems like an understatement when God's love is experienced and understood. John himself seemed to be overwhelmed by the holy love of God revealed in Christ Jesus:

1John 4

7. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.
8. He who does not love does not know God because God is love.
9. By this was the love of God made manifest among us, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.
10. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.
11. Beloved, if God loved us like this, we also should love one another.
12. No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us.

I could go on, as John did, but the point is made. In his first epistle, John used the word "love" or one of its forms fifty times, which means that John used "love" about once every other verse. John fully understood what the pre-existence of the Son revealed about God. He stressed to his readers that they should walk in love because he understood that to be like God, we must do the things that lead to wholesome, loving relationships, as God does.

Every commandment, story, prophecy, and wise saying in the Bible is designed by God for the one purpose of leading us into right relationships, both with one another and with God. Not one sentence in the Bible was written merely to entertain or inform. If people had not fallen into sin and ruined their relationships with God and with one another, there would be no need for a Bible. But we did fall into sin, and to whatever page in the Bible we turn, we find God trying to guide fallen man back to the holiness of right relationships. The first four of the Ten Commandments point us toward a right relationship with God, while the remaining six point us to a right relationship with one another. Stealing, for example, is not the way to have a right relationship with one's neighbor. Stealing hurts people, and so God said, "You shall not steal." Likewise, adultery, lying, and murder ruin relationships, and so God forbade them. Love motivates us to take care of one another's heart. The ungodly deeds that are forbidden in the Ten Commandments are so contrary to good relationships that people in every culture who are concerned for the well-being of others know that those kinds of deeds are evil.

Once, a crafty expert in the law of Moses wanted to engage Jesus in a theological debate. When he asked Jesus which of God's commandments was the greatest,

Matthew 22

37. Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.

38. This is the first and great commandment.”

Then Jesus volunteered this additional information:

39. “And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’

40. On these two commandments hang the whole law and the prophets.”

In other words, all the commandments of God can be summed up by this: “Love God completely, and love one another.” The crafty expert was left speechless. He had not really wanted the answer; he wanted a theological debate.

The apostle Paul agreed with Jesus. He wrote, “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom. 13:10). But love is the fulfillment of the law only because the law came from a loving God. To put Paul’s thought into modern terms, one might say, “Love does not hurt people; therefore, love is what God’s law was all about.” Had God been, above all else, a God of power, then the exercise of authority over others would have fulfilled His law instead of love. Or had He been a God of wisdom, becoming a philosopher would have fulfilled the law. Or if He was a God of splendor, then spectacular architecture would have fulfilled the law. But because God is a God of relationships, love is what fulfills the law.

Occasionally, Jesus would find an elder in Israel who sincerely loved God and who sensed what was truly important:

Mark 12

28. When one of the scribes drew near and heard them reasoning together, seeing that *Jesus* answered them well, he asked him, “What is the most important commandment of all?”

29. Jesus answered him, “The most important of all the commandments is ‘Hear, O Israel! The LORD *is* our God, the LORD alone!

30. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your mind, and all your strength.’ This is the most important commandment.

31. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

32. And the scribe said to him, “Well said, Teacher! You have spoken truthfully, for there is one *God*, and there is no other but He,

33. and to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love a neighbor as oneself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

34a. And when Jesus saw that he had answered with discretion, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

No one is far from the heart of God who considers people to be more important than things. It illuminates God’s way of thinking on this issue if we define sin simply as “wrong relationships”. We can do that because every sin expresses itself in some attitude or action that is harmful to others. Righteousness, on the other hand, always leads to established, peaceful relationships. It is only because God is “the God of peace” (Rom. 15:33; Heb. 13:20) that

peacemakers are blessed (Mt. 5:9). If God were the God of strife, peacemakers would be cursed instead.

In a world like this, of course, it is impossible even for the meekest and wisest of God's children to enjoy peaceful relationships with everybody. Multitudes in this world don't have peace and don't want it. But we who have God's kind of life can live so that we have a peaceful relationship with whoever does want it (Rom. 12:18), and everyone who is like God loves others enough to strive for right relationships, just as He does. As much as we wish it were not so, it is not possible to safely trust everybody in this world; however, in Christ it is possible for us to be the kind of people everybody else can trust. Walking in God's kind of life, we "pursue the things that make for peace, and the things that make for the edification of one another" (Rom. 14:19).

God's true ministers in the Old Testament cried out for Israel to heed the law of God, stressing that the only acceptable way for them to serve God was according to the law. The law was the only way that Israel could serve God acceptably. God's true ministers today cry out for the children of God to live according to the kind of life they have received from God, stressing that the only acceptable way to serve God now is in the Spirit. The law was Israel's access to God, and every true prophet of God knew that. But in this covenant, the Spirit is our access to God (Eph. 2:18), and every true and wise minister of God knows that. Moses told God's people that the law was their life (Dt. 32:46–47), and everyone in Israel who relied on the law to guide them will live forever. Both Jesus and Paul told God's people that the Spirit was their life (Jn. 6:63; Rom. 8:10), and everyone now who relies on the Spirit to guide them will live forever, too.

If everyone around you lived the way you are living, would they be free of sin and happy in the love of God? The Son of God surrendered himself on the cross of Calvary so that he would not be the only creature able to answer yes to that question. When the Father and the Son enter into our hearts by the Spirit, their holiness and strength empower us to live so that if any of our relationships are bad, they are not bad because of anything *we* are doing.

FELLOWSHIP

As good as an individual's fellowship with God may be, it cannot compare to the beauty of a group who live together in harmony with Him. The greatest testimony about Jesus that God's people can offer the world is to walk *together* in the light of God's life; that is, to enjoy, as a unified body of Christ, a right relationship with God and His Son (Jn. 13:35). On the other hand, the worst testimony about Jesus that God's people can offer the world is to be divided, as we are now, by conflicting doctrines and traditions. The lack of fellowship, the absence of right relationships in Christ, makes our light darkness and prevents the body of Christ from being the witness for righteousness that it could be. Note that John emphasized the community, not the individual, in the following exhortation:

1John 1

7. If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and [if we have fellowship,] the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

In other words, the body of Christ will be cleansed from all sin only when the members of that body have a right relationship – fellowship in the light – with one another. Only where

genuine fellowship in the Spirit exists can there be God's kind of government among the saints, and only where God's government is in force can there be peace. And only where peace reigns can the children of God learn and grow in true holiness.

Jesus' last prayer before he withdrew to pray in the garden of Gethsemane was a plea for the Father to grant unity to those who believed in him. Knowing the benefits that would come to a united body and knowing how effective the testimony of a united body would be to the world (Jn. 17:23), Jesus prayed fervently for it. He knew he was about to die, and for him to take the time out of his last few hours on earth to plead with the Father to give us fellowship with one another tells us that our unity was one of his greatest desires:

John 17

20. Not only do I pray for these [disciples], but also for those who believe in me through their word,
21. that they all might be one,¹¹⁹ just as you, Father, *are* in me, and I in you, that they may also be one in us so that the world might believe that you sent me.
22. And the glory you have given me, I have given them, that they might be one, just as we are *one*:
23. I in them, and you in me, so that they might be perfected in unity, and so that the world may know that you sent me and that you loved them, just as you loved me.

Once God's children experience this sweet fellowship with one another, once they experience the manifold blessings of unity in Christ, the thought of losing fellowship with the body becomes for them a most dreaded condition, and they will live so as to avoid it at all costs. That holy fear, known only to those who have experienced the genuine fellowship of Christ and his body, is a critical tool in the hand of Jesus and his ministers for governing his people. The fear of God keeps His people clean (Ps. 19:9); it motivates them to obey God (1Sam. 11:7), to hate evil (Prov. 8:13), and to receive the Father's wisdom and knowledge (Job 28:28; Prov. 1:7; 9:10). People who do not fear God are wicked (Ps. 36:1),¹²⁰ and it is the lack of fear that makes them so.

LIGHTS OF THE WORLD

It is true that Jesus said, "I am the light of the world", but to quote only that part of what he said is to misrepresent the point he was making. What Jesus said was, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (Jn. 9:5) and since Jesus is no longer here, according to his own words, he is no longer the light of the world. It is contrary to the truth, then, for believers to point to heaven and tell sinners that the light of the world is way up there. To sinners, a distant, invisible being in heaven, is no more than a thing, an abstract idea, and an idea offers them no hope at all. Since Pentecost morning, when the disciples received God's kind of life, God has had other sons besides Jesus to be lights in this world, for it is God's life that is the light of the

¹¹⁹ See Footnote 4, page 10.

¹²⁰ The love of God casts out every fear (1Jn. 4:18) *except the fear of God*. Jesus warned his disciples to fear God (Mt. 10:29; Lk. 12:5), as he did (Heb. 5:7).

world, not the fleshly body in which that life dwells, as John even said about Jesus: “In him was life, and the life was the light of men” (Jn. 1:4).

When Jesus ascended to heaven, he took the light of God’s kind of life with him, and there was no light remaining in this world because no creature on earth had that life. But beginning at Pentecost, God shared His life with men, and now it is our turn to shine! Either the light of God’s life is shining through us who have received it, or no spiritual light is shining in this world at all. People must see the light, not just hear about it, and they can only see it in someone who is here with them. That is the way God works and reveals Himself. Neither the Bible nor Jesus is the light of the world – the Bible, because it is a thing, and Jesus, because he is not here.

Paul exhorted the saints to follow him and other faithful servants of God (Phip. 3:17; Heb. 13:7). He could have exhorted them just to follow Jesus, but in order for them to do that, they would have had to build another tower of Babel to try to get up to where Jesus is so that they could see what he is doing. But Christ did not send Paul to tell people to follow a light they could not see. Christ sends his ministers to *be* a light that others can see and follow. That is the truth that saves people from trying to make their own way into heaven, whether it be a tower in Babylon or a doctrine that men have devised. The man whom God sends is, himself, the way.

In the kingdom of God, a messenger from God cannot be separated from the message he brings. When false teachers won the hearts of Paul’s hard-won converts in the ancient Roman province of Asia, the aged, grieving apostle did not tell young Timothy, “All they in Asia have forsaken the *truth*.” Instead, the aged man of God said, “All they in Asia have forsaken *me*” (2Tim. 1:15). Jesus bore witness to the truth (Jn. 18:37), and he was the truth (Jn. 14:6). The apostles likewise bore witness to the truth, and they were the truth to their generation. Indeed, God’s servants are called to be His message to the world more than they are called to tell about it. They are ordained to be the light and to be the truth. If a man is, himself, not the light, then he is spreading darkness wherever he goes, no matter what he does. If a man is, himself, not the truth, he is lying, no matter what he says.

When demons proclaimed the truth that Jesus was the “holy one of God” or “Son of God” (Mk. 1:24; Mt. 8:29), Jesus commanded them to be silent, and then he cast them out (Mk. 1:25). But it was not because those demons were making factually false statements that Jesus commanded them to be silent. Every statement any demon made about Jesus was factually true, but *they themselves* were not the truth, and God hates for the wicked to proclaim truth about Him: “To the wicked man, God says, ‘How dare you declare my statutes, or take up my covenant into your mouth!’ ” (Ps. 50:16).

Satan quoted from the Bible during the Temptation, but the verses he used became lies when he spoke them. Men without the Spirit, likewise, can only misuse the Bible, even if they think they are doing good with it. Satan thought he was doing good, too. In the hands of those not sent by God to speak “in Christ’s stead”, the Bible condemns the righteous because the Bible itself is a lie when it is in the hands of liars. In the hands of Satan’s sons, the holy Bible is a powerful tool of slander against true servants of God.

The Bible needed to be written, but it is only ink and paper. The Bible is “flesh”, that is, a physical thing. God uses it, just as He used the law of Moses, but everything fleshly is contrary to the Spirit (Gal. 5:17). Paul was referring to the Bible when he wrote, “The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2Cor. 3:6). Jesus warned his adversaries that trusting in the Bible to save them

was foolish. The Bible points to him, he told them, but they would not come to him for the kind of life they needed (Jn. 5:39–40).

GOD’S ORDER

The term “government” is an appropriate term for the kind of relationship enjoyed by the Father and the Son from the beginning. The Son humbly confessed, “The Father is greater than I” (Jn. 14:28), and he insisted that he spoke only the words his Father gave him to speak (Jn. 8:28; 14:10) and that he did only what he saw his Father do (Jn. 5:19). And without question, where one is greater than another and has authority to give commandments to another, there is government. So, the Son’s own description of his relationship with the Father makes it clear that from the beginning, there was a well understood order in creation; that is, there was government.

In a previous chapter, I mentioned that to enable us to understand the relationship of God with His Son, God made a way for us to procreate so that we would have a concept of “son”. But that is only one of the benefits of the parent/child relationship. Another benefit is that because all of us have had parents, we all have a concept of “father”. If humans sprang from dirt, then we all would be equal from birth and would have no concept of “father”. But inasmuch as every human since Adam and Eve has had an elder, we all, beginning in the earliest stages of life, develop a concept of a superior being watching over us. By God’s compassionate design, the parent/child relationship inherent in human procreation gives every soul born on earth the capacity not only to understand the profound joy and selfless love that the Father feels for His Son, but also to understand the unquestioning trust, love, fear, and thankfulness that the Son feels toward his Father. One of the first lessons an infant learns in this life deals with this holy order, the government with which creation began.

ENFORCING THE PEACE

The basic function and greatest benefit of government is to provide for the establishment and maintenance of right relationships. This is what Jesus did on earth in the hearts of those who received him. He made the way for them to have and to maintain right relationships with God and with one another. That is also what Jesus did in heaven when he returned to the Father.

A right relationship is not always a pleasant one. When Jesus ascended into heaven and cast Satan and his angels out, he established a right relationship – a very distant one – between them and heaven’s faithful inhabitants. Likewise, when Jesus, through his ministers on earth, casts evildoers out of an assembly of believers, he enforces the peace that he came to create among us and establishes a right relationship – a distant one – between rebellious believers and the rest of the body of Christ. When Satan was cast out of heaven, the angels who were faithful to God rejoiced at their improved situation (Rev. 12:12a); likewise, wise children of God rejoice at the improved situation within their Assembly when the ungodly are removed. The apostle Paul commanded that a certain immoral young man be put out of the Assembly in Corinth, and he rebuked the Corinthian saints for not being grieved that such a man was still in their midst:

1Corinthians 5

1. It is widely reported that there is immorality among you, and such immorality that is not even known among Gentiles, in that a man has taken his own father’s wife!

2. And yet, you are puffed up, and have not mourned instead, so that the one who has done this deed might be put out from your midst.
3. As for me, absent in body but present in spirit, I have already judged, as if present, the one who has done this deed.
4. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you and my spirit are gathered together, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,
5. turn such a man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

There is nothing wrong with God's children being like the risen Son and casting out of their holy Assembly a wicked person. On the contrary, there is everything right with it. It is God's kind of government, manifested on earth.

“THOSE WHO HAVE RULE OVER YOU”

Just as God did not create the Son equal with Himself, so the Son did not create other creatures equal with himself. Throughout creation, among heavenly creatures, among saints, among nations, and even among animal groups, the Son created levels of authority. Paul even pointed out that the stars were created with various degrees of glory (1Cor. 15:41). In setting up creation that way, the Son was merely extending the order of creation into which he himself had been created. It is a hallmark of righteous men that they acknowledge the order into which they are created, just as the Son did. Paul exhorted the saints to have a mind like Christ (Phip. 2:5); that is, to demonstrate respect for the choices made by God concerning who rules over them:

1Thessalonians 5

12. We beseech you, brothers, to acknowledge those who labor among you, and who rule over you in the Lord, and admonish you,
13. and to esteem them as highly as possible in love because of their work.

Hebrews 13

- 17a. Obey those who rule over you, and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls.

No one legitimately rules over God's saints unless God anoints him with authority to do so. Titles bestowed upon someone by a religious institution are absolutely irrelevant to God's kingdom. What difference does it make to God in heaven when men on earth grant titles to one another?

We can only be deceived if we submit to the wrong authority, and we will never come to know God unless we submit to the right one. We all know that it is unwise to trust a minister who is not in a right relationship with God. But it is equally foolish *not* to trust a minister who *is* in a right relationship with God, for that person is a light sent by God to show us the way to eternal life.

Paul warned the saints in Corinth of the dangers of failing to discern who was who in the body of Christ:

1Corinthians 11

29. He who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks condemnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.
30. Because of this, many are feeble and sick among you, and many have fallen asleep.

Some truth is admitted even by false teachers among God's people. These false teachers, who Jesus said would come in his name (Mt. 7:15; 24:5), are ministers who tell only part of the truth. Even while the apostles were still alive, men arose who taught that Jesus is Lord (2Cor. 11:13), but they denied the truth Paul taught. *What made those ministers false is not that they did not believe in Jesus but that they did not believe in Paul.* Jesus was gone, but he had sent Paul as his messenger. Some of God's own people did not recognize Paul as being God's government in human form, and so they would neither submit to Paul's judgment nor accept his revelation. But in rejecting Paul, though they would not have believed so, those people were rejecting Christ – the same Christ they claimed to be serving!

To reject God's messengers is to reject God, for God cannot be separated from His messengers any more than His messengers can be separated from their message. The hidden Son of God proclaimed through the prophet David, "He who fails to come to me damages his own soul; all they that hate me love death" (Prov. 8:36). Paul, John, Peter, and others anointed by God could have said the same thing, for the Son sent them just as the Father had sent the Son (Jn. 17:18; 20:21). Everyone who failed to come to the apostles damaged their own souls, and everyone who hated them loved death. That truth applies to everyone whom God sends. To honor God's messengers is to honor God, and to reject them is to reject God. God's messengers are God's commandments in visible, human form; therefore, to receive and obey those messengers is essential to salvation, for it is essential to salvation to obey God's commandments. God's commandments teach us; they bring light into the soul (Prov. 6:23); and so do God's messengers. Jesus said that he was "the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn. 14:6), and so were the apostles to the people to whom they were sent. The man of God is the way that people should follow, the truth people should believe, and the life people should be living. We are blessed if God grants us the grace to know who in our time is "the way, the truth, and the life", for in the kingdom of God, it is not *what* you know but *who* you know that matters!

No one can get to God by going around those whom He sends, and those who are sent by God are to be received and obeyed. Moses was sent with God's law, the judges were sent with God's power, and wise men and prophets were sent with God's wisdom and word. Last of all, Jesus was sent to God's people as the sum of them all. He *is* God's law, God's Word, and both "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1Cor. 1:24). God honors Himself by standing behind those He has sent, such as Moses, the judges, the prophets, His Son, and then His Son's representatives. In standing behind them, He is merely asserting His authority to ordain whom He chooses to rule in His kingdom. If He did not stand behind them, what point would there be in His sending them?

So far as obtaining eternal life is concerned, the issue for all of us is this: Who are the Son's representatives? We must find them, for whoever they are, they stand between us and Christ, just

as Christ stands between everyone and God.¹²¹ At least twice when Jesus was alone with his disciples, he told them of the powerful position they had been chosen to occupy within the order of God, the first time being when he sent them out in pairs to preach in the villages of Israel:

Matthew 10

40. He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the One who sent me.

The second time was at the Last Supper, and in this case, Jesus did not limit this divine authority to the disciples there with him:

John 13

20. Truly, truly, I tell you, he who receives anyone I send receives me, and he who receives me receives the One who sent me.

When Jesus proclaimed, “He who believes in me is not believing in me, but in Him who sent me” (Jn. 12:44), he was revealing the order of the government of God. Jesus acknowledged God as the higher power over him (Jn. 14:28), and he pleaded with skeptical fellow Jews to acknowledge him as the higher power over them:

John 8

- 21a. Then Jesus said to them again, “I am going away, and you will look for me, but you will die in your sin.”
 . . .
 23. And he said to them, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.
 24. That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I am he, you will die in your sins!”

Thankfully, the disciples and others in Israel did acknowledge Jesus as the higher power, and every wise person since then has likewise acknowledged those sent by Christ as the higher power over them. Paul exhorted the saints to live within the order that God established in Creation, including the order God ordained for the home:

1Corinthians 11

3. I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God.

“YOU ARE DEAD”

We find favor with God when we embrace the order He has ordained and occupy our appointed place in it. But human nature will oppose God’s order as long as the flesh is alive. Human nature is in some ways beastly (Jer. 10:14), especially in regards to being governed (Prov. 12:1). By nature, both men and animals are wild. That is why Peter said that men who live according to the flesh “despise government” and are “like unreasoning beasts in

¹²¹ Even where no anointed man has been sent by God, Jesus still has a relationship with his people. Paul emphasized this in 1Corinthians 3:22–23. At the same time, Paul taught that without hearing the preaching of a man truly sent by God, no one can believe in the real Jesus (Rom. 10:14–15).

nature” (2Pet. 2:10, 12). All fleshly nature, whether human or animal, resists the strictures of government, and it resists government because it thinks of being governed only as being controlled. But God has no interest in controlling human nature. He wants to kill it and replace it with His nature so that we can be free from sin and live forever.

Paul wrote, “The flesh desires *what is* contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit *desires what is* contrary to the flesh” (Gal. 5:17). What the flesh desires more than anything else is to stay alive, and it will do almost anything to keep living. To subdue the flesh’s lusts and walk in the newness of God’s kind of life is the warfare that Jesus fought and won in the wilderness, and it is the warfare that every child of God must wage in this world, for the nature of the bodies they are in is completely opposed to the holy Spirit from God that is in them.

When Paul said, “I die daily” (1Cor. 15:31), he was not complaining about being put to death by some foreign, outside force. He was rejoicing that his sinful human nature was daily being put to death by the life of God that was in him.

Romans 6

6. Our old man is crucified with Christ so that *our* sinful body might be rendered powerless, so that we live no longer as slaves to sin,
7. for he who is dead is free from sin.
- ...
11. Likewise, consider yourselves also dead to sin, but alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Colossians 3

1. If, therefore, you be raised up with Christ, seek the things *that are* above, where Christ is sitting at God’s right hand,
2. and think on things *that are* above, not on things on the earth.
3. For you are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

We saw in the story of Job that even the best of men without God’s life strongly resist God’s righteousness. The reason they resist it so vehemently is that they sense, rightly, that to submit to God’s government and receive His righteousness means the end of something about them. That end is what Paul described as death to sin. God’s government, His righteousness, is not merely the controlling of man’s sinful nature; that is what man’s kind of government does, and it is man’s righteousness to submit to it. Governments of men muzzle the dog so that it won’t bite, but they do not change the nature of the beast. God’s government springs willingly from a sanctified heart and expresses itself naturally in godly deeds and words. John was able to say that God’s commandments are not grievous (1Jn. 5:3) only because John had the life of God within him. For those without God’s kind of life, God’s commandments are more than grievous; they are impossible to keep. This helps us understand why those without God’s kind of life “despise government”; God’s government, to them, is an enemy.

A *WHO*, NOT A *WHAT*

The world has always failed in its pursuit of truth because people seek the wrong thing. Or to be more precise, they seek a thing. They seek a *what* instead of a *who*. God is so completely a God of relationships that even His truth is a *who*, not a *what*. Pilate asked Jesus, “*What* is

truth?” (Jn. 18:38) because he did not imagine that the truth could be a *who*, especially the pathetic-looking *who* standing before him at that moment. When Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father but by me”, it should be noted that he said, “by *me*”, not “by *it*”.

Nobody comes to the living God by means of a dead thing, a *what*.¹²² In the kingdom of God, His word is a *who* (Jn. 1:1), His wisdom is a *who* (1Cor. 1:24; Prov. 8), as are His righteousness and His light (2Cor. 5:21; Mt. 5:14; Jn. 8:12). Even the gospel is a *who*. In Galatians 1:15–16, Paul magnified “God, who called me by His grace, to reveal His Son to me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles.” Paul’s routine use of the phrase, “preach Christ” (1Cor. 1:23; 2Cor. 4:5; Phip. 1:15–16) tells us that to Paul, the gospel *was* Christ and that to preach Christ was to preach the gospel. This is why, before the Son was revealed, no one could preach the gospel; no one then knew *who* the gospel was.¹²³

The only way to eternal life is to follow a *who*, for God chose in the beginning to work through a *who*. Every truth you have ever come to understand and every holy experience you have ever had is the result of being influenced by the right *who*; that is, someone who had, in turn, been influenced by the Son, the first and only *who* that God ever created. Solomon taught that God conceals wisdom deep in the hearts of certain people, like water down in a well, but prudent individuals, he added, find ways to draw that wisdom up and use it (Prov. 20:5). Wise counsel, then, is something that is attained to (Prov. 1:5), and one attains to it by looking for it in the right place; that is, by mining the hearts of the right *people*. The Ethiopian eunuch’s question when Philip came up to his chariot shows that he knew the importance of finding the right *who*:

Acts 8

30. Philip ran up to *it* and he heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and he said, “Do you understand what you are reading?”
31. And he said, “How can I, unless someone guide me?” Then he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Paul asked the saints some revealing questions, such as these:

Romans 10

- 14b. How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?
- 15a. And how shall they preach except they be sent?

In other words, you have come to know whatever truth about Christ that you know only because you heard the right *who* preach, and the right *who* is always someone sent by God for you.

All creatures are happiest who occupy their appointed place in the order of God. When you are in the place that you were created to be, you feel content, for your place is not an *it*. Your

¹²² Under the law of Moses, dead things were of use in the worship and service of God, but after the Son was revealed, those works of the law were stripped of their glory (2Cor. 3:7–10). They became useless, “dead works” (Heb. 6:1; 9:14; Gal. 2:16), for in this covenant, no “thing” is sanctified, only people.

¹²³ Because so much of what Moses and the prophets said had to do with the Son, the New Testament writer was justified in saying, “To us was the gospel preached, as *it was* to them” (Heb. 4:2).

place is a *who* – you! The “place” God has for you is simply you, living as the person God intended you to be from the foundation of the world. Only in that “place”, only in being yourself in Christ, will you ever experience perfect peace and joy. That is why envy is compared with cancer (Prov. 14:30). It quietly eats away at the peace and joy that comes when we are ourselves. It consumes a person’s gratitude for the *who* that God has made him. Envy is a tacit way of grumbling about God’s choices, and it stirs up strife (Rom. 13:13; Phip. 1:15). To avoid envy and strife, we need only know *who* God’s order is and where we belong in that order, for as we follow the right *who* into the knowledge of God, we learn to be content with who we are in Christ.

Wherever the Son is, God’s government is, because wherever the Son is, he is himself. He reigns over all creation merely by being the person that the Father created him to be. He does not have to try to be who he is. He does not wrestle against anything in order to be Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. For him to live is for him to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. When Jesus preached in the villages of Galilee, or healed the sick by the sea, or taught in the temple in Jerusalem, he was just being himself, and those who saw him were seeing God’s government in the flesh. But that, in itself, was not altogether a new thing. God has always expressed His judgments through a living being (when He was not expressing them through nature). Noah, for example, was the expression of God’s government in his time, and he built an ark “by which he condemned the world” (Heb. 11:7). God’s government *in the person of Noah* put the world on trial and condemned it to death! The prophets, too, were visible expressions of God’s government. Indeed, the words they spoke carried authority equal with the law of Moses, and were sometimes superior to it.

It has already been shown that God would on rare occasions command prophets to do deeds blatantly contrary to the law, such as sending Isaiah into the temple to father a child by a prophetess to whom Isaiah was not married (Isa. 8:1–3). God had authority to command such things because He was a living *who*, whereas the law was a dead *what*, a thing. Being perfectly righteous, God is perfectly free to do as He will, and whatever He does will be good and right even if what He does today is different from what He did yesterday. The message of someone whom God sends on any given day takes precedence over the message of anyone whom God sent on a previous day. A story from 1Kings 20:35–36 emphatically makes this point. Before this story took place, God sternly warned His people never to harm His prophets (Ps. 105:15). That was a standard everyone in Israel would have known about. On this occasion, however, God sent a prophet to a certain man to tell that man to strike the prophet and wound him. The man refused to obey God’s new commandment, and as a result, he was cursed *for not harming God’s prophet!* God’s commandment on that day was more authoritative than His previous commandment because it was newer. The lesson in that story is that God’s government is new each day because God is not a rule book. He is alive each day, observing and judging all things, and He may give new guidance at any time to those who trust Him. Living in fellowship with that kind of righteousness is living under the government of God. It is a freedom from rites and rules that is so free that it frightens men, but to make it available to men is the reason Jesus came.

One of God’s goals in giving us His kind of life is that we grow in the knowledge of God to the point of not depending on a *what*, not even the Bible, to tell us what God’s will is. Jesus did not tell his disciples, “A book will be printed that will guide you.” What he said was, “When the

Spirit of truth has come, he will guide you” (Jn. 16:13). *The only truth that exists is what God is saying at this moment.* We cannot know and serve the living God as He wants us to know and serve Him while depending on a *what* to tell us what He wants. God is alive, and when we live with Him, we hear His voice, the tender voice that Isaiah prophesied about: “Your ears will hear a word from behind you, saying, ‘This is the way. Walk in it’” (Isa. 30:21a).

WHO IS WHO?

In every generation, the children of God are called upon to answer the same question: “*Who is the order of God?*” The short answer is Jesus, of course, but if that is all that is said, problems will arise since Jesus is no longer here. Jesus was the Father’s *who* while he was here on earth representing the Father, but since then, Jesus has sent *who’s* of his own to represent him. Those valuable, anointed men and women are God’s order, His government, and the body of Christ desperately needs them. But who are they? *Who we believe is God’s government on earth in our time is more critical to our salvation than believing that God is real and that Jesus is the Christ.* Even demons believe that God is real and that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 19:13–15; Jas. 2:19). In fact, they know it (Mk. 1:23–24; 3:11). But who influenced them so that they erred and became the damned creatures they are? Who was their *who* when it came to the things of God and Christ? Satan, who also knew that God was real and Jesus was the Christ, most influenced their judgment and their conduct; therefore, Satan was the *who* of God to them.

Jesus said that many whom he would reject at the Final Judgment would greet him that day as “Lord” (Mt. 7:21–22). But the Lord they believed in will not have been the right one; it will have been one of the Jesuses that Satan’s sons proclaim. They will have refused the men who preached the true Jesus. Jesus said that his response to those people on that day will be harsh: “Get away from me, you who work lawlessness! I never knew you!” (Mt. 7:23). And the truth is, they never knew Jesus because they never knew the ones he sent. They just believed that God was real and Jesus was Lord.

Since in this world, “there are many gods and many lords” (1Cor. 8:5), let me ask, which God do you serve, and which Jesus is your Lord? False teachers, Paul said, were proclaiming a Jesus different from the one he preached (2Cor. 11:4), and he warned the saints not to trust in that Jesus or those men. Only those sent by the true Jesus can preach the true Jesus. That is why Paul wrote, “How shall they preach [the true Jesus] except they be sent [by the true God]?” (Rom. 10:15a). Paul told God’s children, “The things you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these things put into practice, and the God of peace shall be with you” (Phip. 4:9). This statement forced the saints in Philippi to make a decision. Was Paul boasting of his own greatness, or was he confessing, for their good, who God had made him? Those believers had to decide whether Paul was a spiritual wolf or a genuine man of God. Of course, Paul was only exhorting them to follow him as Christ’s anointed representative, but the believers in Philippi had to decide for themselves if that was really the case. Paul was God’s government for them, their God-given example of the right way, and the truth, and the life, but merely hearing Paul say so would not benefit them. *They had to follow the man.*

The fact that God is love does not suggest that God’s government is to be toyed with. Paul counseled the saints that in order to have a balanced view of the Almighty, they must consider both “the goodness and the severity of God” (Rom. 11:22). God is a God of love, whose mercy

reaches the clouds (Ps. 36:5), but He is also a God of war (Ex. 15:3), before whose fury no one in heaven or earth can stand (Nah. 1:6). The Son himself knew both to love and to fear the Father (Jn. 14:31a; Heb. 5:7). When God's goodness is downplayed, His government seems arbitrary and cold. However, when God's government is downplayed, His goodness loses its power to convict of sin.

THE WISE AND THE FOOLISH

The necessity of truly knowing the Son, the most important *who* in creation, is the basic point of Jesus' parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins.

Matthew 25

1. The kingdom of heaven at that time will be like ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.
2. Five of them were wise, and the other five, foolish.
3. Those who were foolish took their lamps without taking oil with them,
4. but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.
5. When the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep.
6. But in the middle of the night a loud cry was made, "Behold! The bridegroom is coming! Go out to meet him!"
7. At that, all those virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps.
8. Then the foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil because our lamps are going out."
9. But the wise answered, saying, "No, lest there not be enough for us and you. Go instead to those who sell, and buy some for yourselves."
10. And while they were gone away to buy *oil*, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast, and then the door was shut.
11. Later, the other virgins also came, saying, "Lord! Lord! Open up for us!"
12. But he answered and said, "Truly, I tell you, I do not know you."

The most important question concerning this parable is, "What was the difference between the Wise and Foolish Virgins?" If the answer to that question is merely that the wise carried an extra vessel of oil with them to meet the Bridegroom, then we could all become wise by carrying around pots of oil. Obviously, that is not the difference. The difference lies in what those extra vessels of oil represented, for other than that one difference, the Virgins were all very much alike:

- They all were invited to meet the Bridegroom.
- They all knew the time that the Bridegroom was expected.
- They all knew where to go to meet the Bridegroom, and they all went there.
- They all expected to be allowed into the wedding feast with the Bridegroom.
- They all knew to bring lamps.
- They all grew tired and fell asleep as they waited for the Bridegroom.
- They all heard the midnight cry, and they all rose up to meet the Bridegroom.

If you had been looking on at this scene, you would not have seen two groups of five virgins. You would have seen only one group of ten virgins, and you might not even have noticed that some within that single group were carrying extra oil. The fact that the Wise Virgins knew to take an extra vessel filled with oil along with their lamps tells us that they were thinking something the Foolish were not thinking – and their thinking had to do with the Bridegroom. Jesus called five of the ten virgins “the Foolish”, not *in spite* of them doing everything the Wise did, except bring extra oil, but *because* they did everything the Wise did except bring extra oil. And what makes their failure to bring extra oil so significant is that not bringing extra oil means they did not truly know the Bridegroom. But the Wise did know him.

The Wise recognized the Bridegroom’s absolute freedom to do whatever he was pleased to do in every situation, and even to do other than what he said he would do if that is what pleased him. It is because they truly knew the Bridegroom that they spent money for extra oil – money that the Foolish did not spend – and made the effort to carry extra oil on their journey – an effort the Foolish did not make. Their extra vessels of oil were a confession of submission to the Bridegroom. By taking those vessels, they were saying, “The Bridegroom is our Master. We do only what pleases him, and he does only what pleases himself.”

As for the Foolish Virgins, everything they *did* was right. Jesus called them Foolish because of what they did *not* do; to wit, they did not bring extra oil. And they did not bring extra oil because they had not developed a right relationship with the Bridegroom and had never really come to know him. They acknowledged the Bridegroom’s authority to give them commandments. However, even though they did exactly what he told them to do, they did nothing else, for they did not see him as free to do as he pleased but as obligated to do as he said. They would have thought that if he said it, then he had to do it.

The Foolish Virgins would have described the Bridegroom as faithful *to them*. The Wise would have described him as being faithful *to himself*. The Foolish pinned their hope on *what* he said. The Wise pinned their hope on *who* he was. The Foolish trusted his words completely. They would have claimed, as a popular phrase goes, that they were “standing on the word”. But the Wise trusted *him* completely. They were standing on knowledge of the Word himself. The Foolish knew *what he had said*, but the Wise knew *him who said it*.

While the Foolish trusted the Bridegroom to do whatever he *said* he would do, the Wise trusted him to do whatever he *wanted* to do. And if on the way to meet them, the Bridegroom was pleased to stop and do good for someone, which they knew he often did, it was none of their business. Their business was to be ready whenever he came. The Foolish knew his words, trusted his words, and staked their lives on his words, but the Wise knew *him*, trusted *him*, and staked their lives on *him*. The Foolish knew and trusted the *what*, but the Wise knew and trusted the *who*.

This critical difference between the Wise and the Foolish means that, in reality, the Wise Virgins were not going out to meet the same Master that the Foolish were going out to meet. The Foolish were going out to meet a Master they only imagined was coming, a Master made after their own image and “altogether such a one as themselves”. The Wise, on the other hand, were going out to meet the Master who really was.

VISIBLE REPRESENTATIVES

It is not submission to God that fallen man resists so much as it is submission to anyone but “God”. Very few cultures have ever despised the concept of an invisible God reigning over them, but all of them have despised and persecuted the visible fellow creatures whom the true God raised up to represent Him. Historically, men’s response to God’s representatives has been to reject them and instead, to invent gods for themselves because by nature, men do not want the true God, in the form of a visible representative, to be that close to them.

Nature itself bears witness to all people everywhere that God has an order, but when God’s order is present among men, it has always been in the form of a person. And because a living person is visible, visible responses always follow. A true representative of God is a light from which no one can hide because his visible presence forces a visible response. As long as men can keep God far away, in heaven or somewhere like the top of Mount Olympus, they can boast of their devotion to God without being devoted to the true God at all. But when God makes Himself real by sending a real person as His visible representative, it forces the issue and brings to light the real spiritual condition of people’s hearts.

It is the presence of God, not His absence, that most frightens man. And because fallen mankind fears God’s life more than they fear death, most people will die in their sins rather than repent and receive it. Only the wise fear the absence of God’s holy presence, for they know that without God’s presence, the human condition becomes miserable (Jer. 23:33–40; Hos. 5:15; Amos 8:11–14). When God’s life is felt, it convicts people of sin, and of God’s kind of righteousness, and of the Judgment to come (Jn. 16:8). And people feel that conviction in the presence of a visible representative of God because God’s life is within His representatives. The fundamental reason that people rejected the holy Son of God is simply that he was here, with God’s life within him (Jn. 1:4). Nobody in history ever rejected the Son of God before he came.

If the Son had remained hidden or if he had just been a theological idea, something to be discussed in the parlor after supper, he would not have been a problem. But God’s Word “was made flesh and dwelt among us”, and fallen man does not want God that close to him. Christ was hated because “God was in Christ”, and human nature’s fear and hatred of God was exposed when God, in Christ, lived among them. This is what the Son was prophesying about when, through David, he said to the Father, “The insults of those who would insult you fell on me” (Ps. 69:9).

Because God’s life was in Christ Jesus, he was “God with us” (“Immanuel”), and those who hated God hated him. When Christ left earth and ascended to the Father, that would have been the end of “God with us” if God had not sent back the life that was in His Son, the holy life the world hates. Thankfully, though, through the men and women who received God’s kind of life on the day of Pentecost, God began again to be with us. On that day, the body of Christ was created as another Immanuel, a visible representative of the invisible God, as Jesus had been. And God continues to be with men now, through those who possess His kind of life, and the insults of people who hate God fall now upon them as they once fell on Jesus.

PERSECUTION

From almost the foundation of the world, those whom God has sent to represent Him have found themselves in difficult, if not dangerous positions because their clean spirits exposed

man's sinfulness. Jesus' parable from Luke 20 sums up the nation of Israel's maltreatment of God's visible representatives, but it does more than that. It captures the typical attitude of all humanity toward those who dare to be God's visible representatives:

Luke 20

9. Then he began to tell this parable to the people: "A man [God] planted a vineyard and rented it out to husbandmen [Israel's leaders], and then went on an extended journey.
10. When it was time, he sent a slave to the husbandmen so that they might give him some fruit from the vineyard, but the husbandmen beat him and sent *him* away empty-handed.
11. And he sent another slave, but they beat that one, too, and treated *him* shamefully, and sent *him* away empty-handed.
12. Again, he sent a third, and they wounded him, too, and threw *him* out.
13. Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What am I to do? I will send my dear son. When they see him, they will surely reverence *him*.'
14. But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'This is the heir! Come on! Let's kill him so that the inheritance might be ours.'
15. So they threw him out of the vineyard, and killed *him*. What, then, will the owner of the vineyard do to them?"
- ...
19. That very hour, the chief priests and scribes looked for a way to lay hands on *Jesus* ... for they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them.

As long as the owner of the vineyard was far away, the husbandmen could boast without fear of contradiction that they were good stewards. But there were no visible representatives of the owner with them to put their self-serving assessment of themselves to the test. Only when those husbandmen came face to face with the owner's visible representatives were they exposed for who they really were, and the husbandmen hated the owner's son more than they hated the owner's servants because the owner's son more perfectly represented his father. The murderous envy hidden in their hearts was fully exposed when the son came because he fully reflected his father's authority and will.

The religious leaders who conspired to kill Jesus claimed to be good stewards of God, and they insisted that others should love and serve God, too. The Son's presence gave them the opportunity to demonstrate their love for God by loving him, but they were not able. They were already committed to a more distant god. As long as they tended the vineyard of God within the confines of their traditions and ceremonies, they could continue to maintain their appearance of devotion to Him. But a messenger from God trumps every element of institutionalized religion. In God's kingdom, a *who* always trumps a *what* because in His kingdom, life takes precedence over form. His presence demands that people humble themselves to God by humbling themselves to a god close at hand, a fellow creature who has divine authority over them.

Those who sincerely desire a right relationship with God will receive the messenger that He sends. And in receiving the messenger, they honor the One who sent him. Jesus repeatedly made this point.

John 8

42. Jesus said to them, “If God was your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and am come here, and I have not come on my own, but He sent me.”
- ...
48. The [rulers of the] Jews answered and said to him, “Do we not rightly say that you are a Samaritan, and you are demon-possessed!”
49. Jesus answered, “I am not demon-possessed! I honor my Father, and you dishonor me!”

When “the love of God is poured out in our hearts by the holy Spirit” (Rom. 5:5), what is shed into our hearts is the kind of love God has in His heart, and He has great love for His Son. No one filled with the Spirit can say, think, or feel anything derogatory about God’s Son because God never does (1Cor. 12:3), and everyone filled with the Spirit confesses Jesus as Lord and Christ because that is who God made him (Acts 2:36). The love created in us by the Spirit, then, is the love God feels. It loves who and what God loves, and it hates who and what He hates.

SUFFERING

It is doubtful that any of God’s visible representatives have ever been fully prepared for the hatred they have faced from those to whom they were sent. Jesus did as much as he could do for his disciples to prepare them for the persecution they would face after they received God’s life:

John 15

18. If the world hate you, know that it hated me before *it hated* you.
19. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world – on the contrary, I have chosen you out of the world – the world hates you.
20. Remember the statement I made to you: “A servant is not greater than his master.” If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they have obeyed my word, they will also obey yours.

This warning does not apply to those who minister without having God’s life or without being anointed and sent by God. Jesus was not speaking about religious leaders appointed or elected to their office by men; the world, at least in most cases, does not hate such people. Quite the opposite, the world honors them, for the fleshly nature of man senses that those ministers pose no real threat to their sinful ways. Indeed, those kind of ministers are as much a part of the world as the sinners to whom they minister.

Shortly after Jesus met Paul on the road to Damascus, he warned him of the persecutions he would face for becoming one of his visible representatives (Acts 9:16). Paul probably understood better than the disciples did the warning Jesus gave him, for he himself had once hated anyone who was a visible representative of Christ. And later, as a seasoned apostle, Paul passed along that warning to others:

2Timothy 3

12. All who are willing to live godly in Christ Jesus shall be persecuted.

Philippians 1

29. It is given to you, on Christ's behalf, not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him.

But Paul also encouraged the saints to endure suffering so that they might obtain the prize of eternal life:

Romans 8

18. I consider the sufferings of this present time to be unworthy *of comparison* with the glory that shall be revealed in us.

2Timothy 2

11. This is a true saying: If we die with *him*, we will also live with *him*.

12. If we endure, we will also reign with *him*. If we deny *him*, he will also deny us.

Peter, as well, encouraged God's children to patiently endure the hatred of the world:

1Peter 4

12. Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial which is come among you to test you, as though something strange is happening to you.

13. Instead, rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings, so that you may also rejoice exceedingly at the revelation of his glory.

14. If you are being reviled for the name of Christ, *you are* blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part, he is blasphemed, but on your part, he is glorified.

When Peter said that some in the family of God would go astray and "despise government" (2Pet. 2:10), his phrase, "despise government", meant more than to despise being governed. It meant to despise those whom God sends to govern, for the government of God is always a *who*. Therefore, to despise government is to despise somebody.

NO WAY AROUND JOHN

Jesus will not receive into his kingdom anyone who rejects his messengers, for they are "Jesus with us" just as Jesus was "God with us". We can no more get to Christ by going around a man whom Christ has sent than we can get to God by going around Christ. This was emphasized by Jesus when he told the elders of Israel that on Judgment Day, his disciples would be their judges (Mt. 12:27; Lk. 11:19). Jesus was revealing God's government to those elders, and he was doing so by pointing to his disciples. He was warning those elders that his disciples stood between them and God. Unfortunately, they refused to believe him and took shelter behind the whitewashed walls of their religious institution.

Once John the Baptist was anointed and sent to the Jews, their path to eternal life went through him, not around him. John became the way for the Jews to obtain eternal life because *his message* was the way for them to obtain eternal life. In the Final Judgment, it will be as

impossible for a Jew of John's time to escape damnation if he refused John as it will be if he refused Christ, for submitting to John was God's way for the Jews to submit to Christ.

John the Baptist, with his baptism, was a figure of the Son of God and his baptism (Mt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16). To believe in John was to submit to his baptism with water, and to believe in Jesus is to submit to his baptism with the Spirit. Those who came to John to receive his baptism but had not truly repented were refused:

Matthew 3

7. When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he said to them, "Offspring of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"

Likewise, Jesus gives his baptism only to those who truly repent. And like John, he knows who they are. John granted his baptism as a sign that a person had truly believed in him, and Jesus grants his baptism as a sign that a person has truly believed in him. These are the only two baptisms God has ever ordained, and in both cases, the anointing to baptize brought the discernment to know who was worthy to receive baptism. John's baptism with water was not optional for the Jews because submission to John was not optional for the Jews. Similarly, Jesus' baptism with the Spirit is not optional for anyone because submission to Jesus is not optional for anyone.

Whenever God's Old Testament people followed the wrong *who*, they went astray from God's law. And for them to forsake the law meant that they had forsaken Moses, who gave it to them, *even after Moses was dead* (Acts 21:21). Likewise, even after John was beheaded by Herod, God required the Jews to believe him. John's work still had to be done because God still required the Jews to believe in John and repent and receive his baptism. That is why Jesus' disciples took up John's mantle after he was executed and continued baptizing with water in Jesus' name (Jn. 4:1-2; Acts 2:38). There was no way for the Jews to get around John even though John was dead because God, who sent John to the Jews, was still alive. Indeed, there was still no way for them to get around Moses, and he had been dead more than a thousand years! Moses' law and John's baptism remained in force for the Jews after those men died, and God raised up other men to carry on their work. Just as God sent prophets to Israel to continue the work of Moses, Jesus sent disciples to Israel to continue the work of John, preaching his message and baptizing, as he did, those who repented.¹²⁴

SHADOWS OF THE ROCK

At the most critical times in biblical history, God is always found searching for a *man* to use, not a religious institution. Sometimes, He found a man willing to be a light for the people (e.g., Isa. 6); at other times, He did not:

Ezekiel 22

30. I searched among them for a man *who* would build a wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it. But I found none.

¹²⁴ For more on this, see my tract, "Baptism", available for online reading at GoingtoJesus.com.

Whenever God wanted to provide the righteous with a place of safety, He did not look for a cave in the mountains. Rather, he looked for a man willing to stand up and be the truth, the standard, for his generation. Foreseeing the time when He would send His Son as His representative, and His Son would then send others to represent him, the Father promised this:

Isaiah 32

1. A king [the Son] shall reign in righteousness, and princes [the Son's ministers] shall rule justly.
2. And a man will be like a shelter from the wind, and a covert from the storm, like streams of water in parched ground, like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

The “great rock” is Christ (1Cor. 10:4), but the shadows of that great Rock are the men who are sent to represent him. Notice that in Isaiah’s prophecy, the representatives of Christ, not Christ himself, are sent to be a shelter for God’s people and a covert from spirits of this world. Like Jesus, they are “streams of water” and are “like a watered garden” (Isa. 58:11) because from them, souls who hunger and thirst for God’s righteousness eat living bread (Jn. 6:51, 58) and drink living water (Jn. 4:10). God’s ministers are not “wells without water”, boasting of a gift they do not possess (Prov. 25:14; 2Pet. 2:17). They truly possess the gift of God.

When God calls to His people to “come out from their midst” (2Cor. 6:17), He is not just calling them away from the wrong *who*. He is calling them to the right *who*, the ones whom He has anointed to feed them His knowledge:

Jeremiah 3

14. “Come back, O wayward children,” says the LORD, “for I am married to you! And I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion.
15. And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, and they will feed you knowledge and understanding.”

A MAN OR AN INSTITUTION?

Peter said, “If any man minister, *let it be done* with the strength that God supplies” (1Pet. 4:11). The truth is that no one *can* minister without God’s strength, for the strength to minister in Christ’s stead comes only from God’s kind of life (1Pet. 1:12). And since no institution has ever been given the holy Spirit (Jesus did not die for institutions), no institution has the power either to minister the gospel or to ordain anyone to do so.¹²⁵ Seminaries can teach such things as biblical history and languages, but such education cannot to the slightest degree make a man a minister of Christ. Only the strength God gives does that.

It is not uncommon for people who are searching for God’s way to follow the wrong *who* for a time, but if they continue loving Jesus, they will find the right *who*. Jesus will not fail them. On the other hand, people who serve God in the way of religious institutions cannot possibly be doing things God’s way because God has never called and anointed a religious institution to do

¹²⁵ The term “institution” can refer to any earthly religious system, but in this context, I am referring specifically to the Institution called Christianity. Much more on the Christian Institution in Chapter 10.

anything. Religious institutions have always been the greatest stumbling blocks for those who are seeking God and the greatest persecutors of those who find Him. *Whenever true righteousness has been accomplished in the earth, it has been accomplished by individuals anointed and sent by God – in spite of religious institutions, not because of them!* Even sinners have the wisdom to know that nations do well when they follow leaders who have good sense. The spiritual equivalent of that wisdom is to follow men with *God-sense*; that is, men “who by experience have the senses trained to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14).

Ministers of religious institutions often sound the warning for believers not to follow a man. They frown upon or pity anyone who follows a man instead of an institution. That condemnation may seem prudent when left unchallenged, but it is self-serving nonsense. The only people on earth who can possibly be doing things God’s way are those who *are* following a man. Were Paul and Peter misleading God’s saints when, instead of saying, “Follow Christ”, they pointed to themselves and others on earth as examples to follow (Phip. 3:17; 2Thess. 3:9; 1Pet. 5:3)? Of course not. God’s children need examples they can see, and those who are lights in this dark world are precious. Paul was not puffing himself up to say “Follow me” (1Cor. 11:1). He was humbly pointing out his place in God’s order for the good of God’s children.

People have a saying: “If you can’t beat ’em, join ’em.” Satan’s version of that old saying is this: “If you can’t beat ’em, then invite ’em to join you.” In the religious realm, this means that if you can’t stop God from sending servants to His people, then slander those servants and invite God’s people to join a religious institution. Sadly, this tactic has often succeeded, the tragic events at Baal-Peor being one of the chief Old Testament examples. After Moab’s King Balak failed to “beat” Israel, the prophet Balaam advised the king to invite Israel to “join” the Moabites in the worship of their gods:

Numbers 25

2. And the *Moabite* women invited the people [Israel] to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people feasted and bowed themselves down to the gods of those women.
- 3a. And Israel joined himself to Baal at Peor.¹²⁶

So, after failing in his efforts to put a curse on Israel (Num. 23–24), Balak won Israel over with friendship. He extended to Israel a friendly invitation to the institution of Baal worship. This was a crafty tactic described in another place as “destroying with peace” (Dan. 8:25). It is partly because men of the Institution are so successful in maintaining the appearance of goodness that James cautioned the saints that “the friendship of the world is enmity against God” (Jas. 4:4). The money-hungry Balaam devised that crafty counsel (Num. 31:16; Rev. 2:14), but he lost his soul in the process. From that time on, Balaam was considered by God to be a soothsayer instead of a prophet (Josh. 13:22). But to foolish men, Balaam still appeared to be good. Indeed, to them, he was even better than before because now, he was more open-minded to different theological opinions.

¹²⁶ So many of God’s people provoked His wrath with “the sin of Baal-Peor” that God struck Israel with a plague in which 24,000 perished (Num. 25:6–9).

When the prophets labored among the people of God, false prophets slandered them and praised the long-dead “father Abraham”. Later, when the prophets were safely in the grave, deceivers praised both Abraham and the prophets, but slandered Jesus. Later still, after Jesus was gone, false apostles praised Abraham, the prophets, and Jesus, but persecuted Paul. Within a few generations more, as the Institution of Christianity developed, its ministers praised Abraham, the prophets, Jesus, and Paul while slandering and persecuting the *who* of God in their time. The men of the Institution have always praised dead servants of God; it’s the living men of God that they despise. Dead prophets are far away. They no longer pose a threat to the Institution because they are no longer here to expose those who are twisting their words, the way Paul condemned certain men for perverting his (Rom. 3:7–8). Peter did not preach Paul’s gospel for the Gentiles, for he had a different gospel for the Jews (Gal. 2:7). Nevertheless, he acknowledged Paul’s gospel for the Gentiles as being of God, and he, too, condemned those who perverted the doctrine that Paul taught:

2Peter 3

15. Consider the patience of our Lord to be salvation, as our beloved brother Paul has also written to you, according to the wisdom given to him,
16. as indeed *he writes* in all *his* letters when he speaks in them about these matters, among which are some things hard to understand, which those who are ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as *they* also *do* the other scriptures.

Condemned by Paul and Peter or not, once Paul and Peter were in their graves, the Institution’s leaders claimed them as their spiritual fathers, and so it is to this day. Men of the Institution always claim to be the spiritual descendants of men of God from the past, but they are only using the sacred memory of true men of God (whom their precursors persecuted) to legitimize themselves. Jesus did not spare such hypocrites his wrath:

Matthew 23

29. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees! Hypocrites! You build up the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous,
30. and then you say, “If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the murder of the prophets.”
31. Thus you bear witness against yourselves, that you are the sons of the murderers of the prophets.
32. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers!
33. You snakes! You offspring of vipers! How can you escape the damnation of Gehenna?¹²⁷

Writing this reminds me of an elderly, righteous woman in my hometown whom I knew. She was, in the early 1900s, a founding member of a local holiness church. During one of my visits, in which we would enjoy great fellowship in the Spirit, she told me the story of her “takin’ in washin’” – that is, washing neighbors’ clothes (which she did by hand) – to earn an extra dime a

¹²⁷ Jesus used “Gehenna” when speaking of what John in Revelation calls “the Lake of Fire” (Rev. 20:10, 14–15), as is shown in my book, *What the Bible really says about HELL*, available for online reading at GoingtoJesus.com.

week to contribute to the church's building fund. Her humble home was close to the church that was eventually built; however, in her last years, she was too feeble to walk that far, and no member of the church, no relative, and no church official would respond to her requests to be carried to church meetings. They all knew (because she let them know, as she did me) that if she went, she would reprove the entire congregation for their increasing worldliness. She would have been right to do so. Many years before, as a teenager, I was a member of that church, and so I knew many of its members well. The errors in the church that she was seeing were serious errors, and as a godly elder, her feelings and thoughts would have benefitted them if she had been given an opportunity to express them. But at no time in her last years was she allowed to attend their church meetings to testify about what she saw.

When this precious old saint died, I made the 120-mile trip from my home to be at her funeral, which was attended by a large number of people. I sat near the back of the church, and the scene before me nearly took my breath away. Some of the same people who had for so long refused to allow this dear mother in Christ into their church while she was alive were praising her to the highest for her holy life and her long-standing loyalty to their church. They told stories about her, including her work to establish the church in that city. Had I not known better, I would have thought she all but lived in that church building and did little else but work for its success. Before the funeral service even began, two middle-aged men sat in the pew in front of me, talking aloud about their connections with the dead saint. The first man, a part-time minister who had grown up in that church, spoke in glowing terms of how much she had helped him when he first married. The other man responded, claiming with evident pride that when he was an infant, she had nursed him from her own breasts when his mother was sick.

It was a heart-rending scene. Now that the neglected old woman was dead, she was useful. With her voice stilled by death, she was allowed into the building. Suddenly, to be known to have been close to her was to have status in the Assembly, and that status was a prize for which people fought with competing stories.

This is how dead servants of God are used by the foolish to promote their Institution, but the wise take advantage of God's servants while they are alive, even if it means that in following them, they suffer with them.

FRUSTRATED

Before Acts 2, when the Spirit came and the New Testament began, the battle for the hearts of God's children centered on one issue: Who visibly represented God on earth? Was it Moses or was it Balaam? Was it the prophets of the Institution or was it Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Urijah? Was it Jesus or was it the elders? But not long after Christ returned to the Father, spiritual warfare changed from who visibly represented God to who visibly represented the Son, and so it has been since that time. There must be men alive now who are anointed to represent Christ and to govern among the saints. The love of God for His family assures us of that. Wherever they are, the greatest obstacle to their being heard is the influence of ministers of the Institution who claim that their Institution represents Jesus.

Old Testament servants of God such as Jeremiah were frustrated by false prophets. In one instance, the professional prophets persuaded God's people not to believe Jeremiah's claim that Nebuchadnezzar's invading Babylonian army was the expression of God's wrath against them

for their sins. Jeremiah knew that if Jerusalem's inhabitants would repent and surrender to King Nebuchadnezzar, God would let them live, but the professional prophets undermined Jeremiah's influence with false counter-promises. Heartbroken, persecuted, and lonely, Jeremiah wept and prayed:

Jeremiah 14

13. Ah, my Master! O LORD! Behold, the prophets are telling them, "You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you lasting peace in this place."

Jeremiah 23

9. My heart within me is broken because of the prophets!

In this New Testament, God's servants have to deal with the same problem. Paul grieved for his beloved Galatian converts who had been led astray by false teachers:

Galatians 1

6. I marvel that so quickly you are turning away from Him who called you by the grace of Christ to a different gospel,
7. which is not another, but there are certain *men* who are troubling you, determined to alter the gospel of Christ.

And Peter warned the children of God,

2Peter 2

- 1a. False prophets were among the people, just as there shall also be false teachers among you, who shall bring in destructive heresies.
2. And many shall follow their licentious ways, because of whom the way of truth shall be spoken evil of.

Jesus, seeing that this was coming, warned his followers to guard against such men:

Matthew 7

15. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

Matthew 24

4. Take heed, lest someone deceive you.
5. Many shall come, using my name, saying that I am the Messiah, and they will deceive many.

Were it not for ministers with titles and authority bestowed upon them by the Institution, the true representatives of Christ would have a far greater impact in the earth. I say again, the greatest hindrance to God's work on earth has always been men of the Institution. Their appearance of authority and sanctity is a snare that God's children have always had to overcome, and the only way they can overcome it is to recognize the order of God; that is, to acknowledge those whom God has anointed and sent to them for their good.

EARLY VICTIMS

Ministers whom Jesus described as sons of the Accuser hated the light and conspired to kill him. But through death, Jesus succeeded in his mission to purchase the life of God for man, and Satan's sons could not undo that holy work. When they brutalized those who loved Jesus, their cruelty had an effect similar to that of trying to stamp out a fire in dry brush. It only spread the flames:

Acts 8

- 1b. On that day, a great persecution broke out against the Assembly in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.

As time went on, unwise believers began to drift toward sectarianism, forming religious clubs based on differing opinions. Paul nipped those buds of religious institutionalism whenever he saw them sprouting in God's garden:

1Corinthians 1

10. I urge you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in the same mind and in the same judgment.
11. For it has been reported to me concerning you, my brothers, by those of Chloe's household, that there are divisions among you.
12. What I mean is that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ."
13. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you, or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

1Corinthians 3

3. You are still carnal! For as long as envy and strife and dissensions are among you, are you not carnal, behaving like men?
4. For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I, of Apollos," are you not carnal?

What is the difference in saying, "I am of Paul," or, "I am of Apollos," or, "I am of Christ," and saying, "I am a Lutheran," or, "I am a Catholic," or, "I am a Baptist," or, for that matter, "I am a Christian"? It is all wrong. The mentality of setting ourselves apart with religious titles is wrong. It is worldly. It was ungodly in Paul's day for believers to divide themselves into religious clubs, and it is ungodly now.

Jesus resisted the spirit of institutionalized religion before Paul did. He rebuffed the first relic-worshipper he met, when a woman interrupted his teaching with shouts of praise for certain of his mother's body parts:

Luke 11

27. It came to pass that, as he was saying these things, a certain woman in the crowd lifted up her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts which you nursed!"
28. But he said, "No! Blessed are those who hear the word of God, and obey it!"

Still, in spite of all that Jesus and the apostles had done, when the apostles grew old and began to die out, even Paul was forced to admit that Satan had won (2Tim. 1:15). Paul's converts everywhere turned away from him, following ministers who led them toward a religious system in which ceremonial form would eventually quench the Spirit of life that they had.

Paul's heart was broken (Phip. 3:18–19). He was frustrated in his purpose, just as the prophets had been, by ministers of the Institution who convinced God's children that they were ordained of God (Gal. 2:4–5). Paul wished that those who had led his converts astray from life in the Spirit would be cut off from God (Gal. 5:12); that is, that they would be damned. Early victims of this deception were Paul's converts in Galatia and Corinth:

Galatians 3

- 1a. O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth?
...
3. Are you so foolish? Having begun in *the* Spirit, are you now perfected by *the* flesh?

Galatians 5

7. You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?
8. This persuasion is not from the One who calls you.

2Corinthians 11

13. Such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ.
14. And no wonder, for Satan himself is disguising himself as a messenger of light.
15. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works.

These scriptures show us that even in the days of the first apostles, Satan was working among God's people to form an institution to which he could invite believers and thereby separate them from those who were the real government of God, such as Paul. In that effort, Satan's eventual success is evidenced by his establishment of the Institution of Christianity, the church, as the norm for God's children.

God's children were seduced by the friendship of Constantine, the Emperor of Rome, into blending with the Roman Empire,¹²⁸ and the Institution that was formed from that unholy alliance claimed for itself the name, "Christianity". Holy men who were sent from God "not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power" (1Cor. 2:4) were replaced by men ordained by the Institution, whose gospel was a "word only" gospel (1Thess. 1:5) imposed upon civilization by the State. But in replacing true servants of Jesus, Satan and his ministers had replaced the true Jesus, and in replacing the true Jesus, Satan and his

¹²⁸ Constantine only made the Roman Empire's proposal of marriage, as it were, to the body of Christ. It was Emperor Theodosius who presided over the marriage of believers and the world. His law code forbade anyone in the Empire from practicing any religion other than the one that the Empire and those believers had produced, the religious system called Christianity (*The Theodosian Code*, 16.1.2; 16.5.1; 16.5.6; 16.10.4).

ministers had replaced the true God with a god more to their liking. When Satan offered Jesus the world, he turned it down, but when he offered the world to Jesus' followers, many of them accepted it. The "body of Christ", the "Virgin" of God's kingdom, "the apple of His eye", was seduced into bed with the world and became "the Great Whore" (Rev. 17:1), the inscrutable "Mystery: Babylon the Great, the Mother of harlots and abominations of the earth" (Rev. 17:5). And when John saw her, the woman was "drunk on the blood of the saints and on the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (Rev. 17:6).

The lie with which the Great Whore has made the whole world drunk is that to believe in Christ means to belong to Christianity. Even unbelievers believe that. Most of God's children are also drunk on that lie, and they join Christian churches because of it, thinking that joining a church demonstrates the sincerity of their faith. Thus, Satan has found a way to use for his own glory the love for God that His children feel for Him. The very title of the Institution, "*Christianity*", attracts God's children and makes them willing to join her. So, when God calls them, they innocently go about looking for a "good church" to join. But God calls sinners to Himself, not to Christianity, and away from church religion altogether! All that we need is to find our way into the body of Christ, not into a church, and that way is to be baptized into it with God's life (1Cor. 12:13).

It grieves our heavenly Father for His children to hear His call and then, thinking to please Him, make themselves members of the most wicked thing on earth. The darkness of the world at large cannot compare to the darkness of the Institution. Many of God's children who join a Christian church feel dissatisfied with church religion, but to fit into the mold, they go along with its doctrines and traditions. Then the prophecy is fulfilled that said they "are estranged from the womb; from birth, they go astray, speaking lies" (Ps. 58:3).

WHICH GOD AND WHICH JESUS?

Observing the sinful conduct of his fellow Israelites, Isaiah said, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray; every one of us has turned to his own way" (Isa. 53:6a). At that time, most of God's people had begun to live by whatever standards suited them instead of by God's law. But why did so many of God's people do that? Why did they trade their hope of eternal life for the vanity of heathen myths? The answer is that instead of the simple standard of holiness found in the law of Moses, the people embraced gods whose standards were more accommodating to their fleshly nature. Like the heathen, they began to worship the gods of their choice rather than worship the true God, who had chosen them.

God's New Testament people have done the same. Instead of the simple standard of holiness found in the Spirit, they survey the traditions and standards offered by various Christian churches and choose the one that pleases them most. What Isaiah heard false prophets exhorting God's people to do in his day is the Old Testament equivalent of what men of the Institution exhort God's people to do now, using such phrases as "join the church of your choice". What is the difference between "join the church of your choice" and "worship the god of your choice"?

The God and Jesus¹²⁹ of Catholicism cannot be the God and Jesus of Mormonism. The God and Jesus of Presbyterianism cannot be the God and Jesus of Pentecostalism. Common sense, if nothing else, should tell us that the God and Jesus of one Christian sect cannot be the God and Jesus of another Christian sect if the Gods and Jesuses of those two sects teach conflicting doctrines and are worshipped in different ways. In the kingdom of the one true God and one true Jesus, there is one Spirit, one body, one faith, one baptism, and one hope (Eph. 4:4–6). The spirits that inspire Christian sects to teach a way other than that one way of God and His Son are the Gods and Jesuses of those sects. To live and worship as each of those Gods and Jesuses say to live and worship is to honor those Gods and those Jesuses instead of the true God and His Son.

Let me restate my previous question: Which God and Jesus do you believe in? Which Bridegroom are you going out to meet, the one who is really coming again or a different one who is more pleasing to your flesh? Which God is the God of your manner of living and worship? Is it one of the gods that the flesh loves, or is it the God who “loved us and called us out of darkness into His marvelous light”? Beware of your choices, for Jeremiah declared that the human heart is not merely deceitful, but that it is “deceitful above all things” (Jer. 17:9).

The human heart is unwilling to believe the truth because what human nature demands is a distant god, one that cannot truly be known because with that kind of god, the flesh does not have to inconvenience itself to serve him. That is, in fact, the only kind of god our fleshly nature ever willingly serves. Speaking for us all, Paul confessed that “in me (that is, in my flesh), dwells nothing good” (Rom. 7:18), and whenever man’s worthless flesh finds a god it is pleased to serve, then that god has to be as worthless as the flesh that serves it.

Since in human nature, nothing good dwells, if anyone feels bad for doing wrong, it cannot be that he has been convicted by his own conscience because conviction for sin is something good. It is God’s good Spirit that convicts of sin (Jn. 16:8–9), not the human conscience. Without the influence of God’s Spirit, man has no conscience, and feels no guilt for evildoing and no fear of the coming judgment. But because God loves people, He makes them feel bad for doing evil in order to teach them not to do it. Likewise, if anyone feels good for doing what is right, he feels good only because God makes him feel good in order to encourage him to do righteousness. If untouched by God, human feelings are dead to both the love and the fear of God, and in that case, the evil that humans will do has no earthly limitation. Goodness has no charm where evil has no fear.

Any god we loved while living “in the flesh” had to be a god we had no hope of knowing, and we liked it that way. That is the kind of god that men have always preferred and have flattered with eloquent sermons as being so profound that he is unknowable. But we knew in our guilty hearts that as long as we clung to that kind of god, we did not have to trouble ourselves with genuine repentance and faith. *None of us would have chosen Jesus to be our Messiah. Nor would we have chosen his Father to be our God.* We are neither wise enough nor good enough to have done that. God had to choose us.

¹²⁹ All Christian sects claim to serve the God and Jesus of the Bible. Out of respect for that, I capitalized “God” and “Jesus” in this context.

JUST A FEW

In spite of God's free offer of eternal life, only a few on earth are willing to turn from their own ways and receive it:

Matthew 7

13. Enter by the strait gate because the gate *is* wide and the road *is* broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter by it.
14. How strait the gate and narrow the road that leads to life! And there are just a few who find it.

God's kingdom is a kingdom of the heart, a spiritual kingdom that no one can enter by his own will; we must be invited (Jn. 6:44; 15:16). Those who are invited into God's kingdom by His servants (Mt. 22:1–4) are given a choice that the world does not have. God's invitation sets them free to come into the kingdom or to refuse God's offer of life and to continue to worship Him "in vain" (Mt. 15:9). The call of God creates an open door to follow true men of God out of darkness and to begin to worship God in the "newness of life" (Rom. 6:4), but it does not force anyone to walk through it.

God accepts no praise from humans except the praise that comes from those whom He has sanctified by His Spirit. *If we would offer the Father acceptable worship, we ourselves must first be made acceptable to Him.* This truth applies to everyone in every place. God's life is the only thing that makes human worship acceptable to Him. Human praise comes from the human spirit, and humans in themselves cannot worship God acceptably or please Him (Rom. 8:8). In his time among us, Jesus knew that human praise could not be trusted because he knew that, at that time, all humans were still merely human (Jn. 2:23–25). It is not possible to safely trust the claims of anyone in this world, including ourselves, until the life of God transforms us into the kind of people who can be trusted. That blessed state is the place to which God's true ministers lead us so that we can know and serve God rightly and be blessed. But if after we hear God's call, we choose to follow men of the Institution, then the Institution's curse will fall on us as well as them (Rev. 18:4b–5).

God's government is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it yields the incomparable blessings of life and peace to those who submit to it, but on the other hand, it yields "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul" who refuses it (Rom. 2:8–9). God's kingdom is a kingdom of perfect, enduring joy and righteousness. At the same time, it is a kingdom with an order, visible representatives who cannot be opposed except at the risk of one's soul.



A BRIEF PERSONAL NOTE

The revelation of the Son floods our hearts with love and joy; at the same time, the brilliant light of the Son exposes some harsh realities concerning the works of men. Jesus bluntly told us that things highly esteemed by people are an abomination to God (Lk. 16:15). Only the revelation of the Son has the power to teach us just how true that statement is. In this final part of the book, I am compelled to speak plainly about some things that are highly esteemed by many of God's own dear children. I beg my Readers not to interpret my directness as ill-will, but to receive it as Christ-like "plainness of speech", the godly fruit of the Son's sweet, overwhelming light.



Chapter 10

Life vs. Form

I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly.

John 10:10

Pentecost is an experience, not an organization.

Preacher Clark in a 1974 sermon

“CONTRARY TO US”

All institutions, whether organized for political, religious, or social reasons, are defined by their forms; that is, by the rules that those institutions require of those who belong to it. Some forms provide benefits, such as forms of respectful behavior or quietness in a library that some schools require of children; and the good conduct required by laws of a country, such as honest business dealings; and the good conduct required by certain religions, such as helping the poor. Other institutional forms do harm, such as the forms of cruelty that some Islamic schools teach, using textbooks that show students how to cut off people’s hands and feet, or the immoral forms authorized by a perverse government, such as ceremonies for the marriage of men to men and women to women, or the gruesome forms of many ancient religions, such as child sacrifice and temple prostitution. In all cases, the forms define the institution, and every institution is sustained only by adherence to its forms. *If people cease practicing the forms of an institution, that institution ceases to exist.*

The most beneficial forms ever known on earth were the forms contained in the law that God gave to Moses for Israel. Moses’ law was itself an institution, and it had its own forms, but it was an institution ordained by God, not men, and it was holy and good. Paul said that if there ever was a law that could have made people righteous, Moses’ law would have done it (Gal. 3:21). But the need for the form of Moses’ law was done away with when God gave us His life. With the purity and power of God’s kind of life within us, we can do good without the use of any forms – *even the forms of righteousness that God Himself ordained in the law* (Eph. 2:15).

The law of Moses, being an institution, was defined by the forms it required of the Jews. Observing holy days was a form; animal sacrifice was a form; circumcision was a form; even the writing down of commandments such as “You shall not covet” was a form. All external standards imposed upon people are forms. The reason Paul said that the law was “contrary to us” (Col. 2:14) is because *it* was holy and we were not. The law was an external force imposing

a form of righteousness upon us that was contrary to our sinful nature. This is what made the law of Moses, in Peter's words, "a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (Acts 15:10).

"FOR US"

By the Spirit, God shares His nature with us so that we, like Him, can live holy lives without reliance upon forms. This new nature brings into our hearts the knowledge of God, making us alive to God's thoughts and feelings. This holy life, purchased for us by the sacrifice of Christ, is utterly free of form because God is. He is the great "I Am" (Ex. 3:14) because He is always and only what He decides to be at any given moment. Men cannot box God in because He is always free to do as He will. Men cannot predict what God will do next because He has no habits. He will do differently in situations that are virtually identical. In Exodus 17:5–6, when Israel begged for water in the wilderness, God commanded Moses to strike a rock on Mount Horeb, but later, in Numbers 20:7–8, when Israel again begged for water, God commanded Moses to speak to a rock instead. We cannot figure out God's will today based on what He commanded yesterday; His will must be revealed to us day by day, situation by situation. No external law can do that. No form can create within us the knowledge of God or His kind of righteousness. Every moment is new with God because He is truly alive.

When Paul spoke of the eternal enmity between the Spirit of God and the nature of the flesh (Gal. 5:17), he was talking about the enmity between God's kind of life and a life subject to form. The nature of man craves form because with form, he can measure up. With form, he can retain his sinful nature but maintain an appearance of goodness. When Jesus said that those whom he would make free would be "free indeed" (Jn. 8:36), he meant that they would be free from the flesh's addiction to form because they would be made free to live God's kind of life (Rom. 6:16–18).

No earthly institutional form, whether it be the form of the law that came from God or one of the forms that men have devised, could ever make us alive to God. An institution is a what, a dead thing. We needed a who, someone alive to God. In order for us to be given true life, a true life had to be given for us.

Ephesians 5

2. Live in love, as Christ also loved us, and gave himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a fragrant aroma.

1John 3

- 16a. By this, we have come to know love, in that he laid down his life for us.

The law, being a physical thing, could not enter into man's heart. It could only command people from the outside. But in the appointed time, through His beloved Son, God made a way to put His law where we needed it to be, within us:

Hebrews 8

- 8b. Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,

- 9a. not the kind of covenant that I made with their fathers in the day I took their hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. . . .
- 10a. This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my laws into their mind and write them on their heart.

Before man was given God's kind of life, the entire human race had no choice but to live in a world of forms. Knowing this, God gave to Moses some ceremonial forms that would do men good, forms that would be a light to the nations and would prepare Israel for the Son's coming – if those forms were revered and faithfully carried out. The forms of Moses' law, as we have shown, were shadows of the coming Son of God (Col. 2:16–17). Without the Son, those ceremonial shadows would have been meaningless exercises; the law's ceremonies would have been no shadows at all because there would have been no light behind them. God's purpose for the law's forms, the thing that gave those forms meaning, was to prepare Israel to receive His Son. That is why, when the Son came, he told his followers, "Do not think that I have come to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Mt. 5:17). And fulfill them, he did. When the resurrected Son of God ascended into heaven and sat down at the Father's right hand, his glory was so great that it reduced the glory of the shadow, the law, to absolutely nothing:

2Corinthians 3

- 7a. If the ministry of death, engraved with letters on stones, came with glory,
 8. how shall the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?
 9. For if the ministry of condemnation *had* glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness overflow with glory.
 10. That which has been glorious has, in this respect, come to have no glory because of the surpassing glory *of Christ*.

The authority of Jesus to make this change in God's covenant with Israel is astonishing. Solomon said that nothing God does can be changed (Eccl. 3:14), but by bringing the law of Moses to an end, Jesus proved that anything God does can be changed if God sends someone to change it. *Christ made the holy law of Moses non-holy – an unthinkable accomplishment – so that those who continued to serve God in the law's rites and rules after the Son was revealed were dishonoring God.*

By God's command, Israel's priests used death in their ministry. They offered God dead flesh and dead blood of dead animals; they washed themselves with dead water; they ate meals of dead food, arrayed themselves in dead garments, and observed dead holy days. But now, also at God's command, our heavenly High Priest, Jesus, ministers in life, and the glory of the life of God so far surpasses the glory of the law's dead forms that it reduced those glorious forms to useless "dead works" (Heb. 6:1; 9:14), worthless as dung (Phip. 3:5–8). How great the Son is, that the holiest things ever known on earth, the forms of Moses' law, would become worthless as dung after he was revealed!

With God's life, His law is no longer something we read. In His life, we *feel* the law of God; we *sense* what pleases Him. With God's Spirit in us, we naturally love Him with all our being, and we naturally love our neighbors as ourselves, which the handwritten law of Moses could

only command people to do (Lev. 19:18; Dt. 6:5). How much better is this covenant, in which we may know within ourselves what is right instead of searching in a book for the proper form to follow!

ISRAEL'S FIRST SELF-WILLED INSTITUTION: A KINGDOM

Paul said that true faith looks more to what cannot be seen than to what is visible, "for things that are seen are temporal, but things that are not seen are eternal" (2Cor. 4:18). To those without God's life, however, God's spiritual kind of government does not seem as dependable as an earthly institution because the flesh trusts more in what it can see than in the invisible God. When Israel first took possession of Canaan, God's way of governing Israel was to choose and anoint individuals, such as Deborah, Gideon, and Samson, to deliver the nation whenever it was in trouble. His government never failed, but many in Israel wanted a kind of government that, to them, seemed more dependable. They did not understand that their demand for a king amounted to a demand for something more dependable than God, not just more dependable than the men and women God sent. Their lack of faith in the anointed judges and prophets was, in reality, a lack of faith in God, and He told the prophet Samuel that in demanding an earthly king, Israel had rejected Him:

1 Samuel 8

6. The thing they said, "Give us a king to judge us!" was evil in Samuel's eyes, and Samuel prayed to the LORD.
7. And the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them."

It is only of God's love and mercy that Israel's rejection of Him was not the end of their story. What a humble God! He was deeply grieved for His people's choice of another to rule over them, and yet, He still loved and cared for them. In fact, centuries before this event, God knew that His people would reject Him and demand an earthly king, but He loved them so much that He took the time to counsel them, through Moses, on the safest way to reject Him so that they would not completely destroy themselves:

Deuteronomy 17

14. When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving to you and have possessed it and settled in it, then you will say, "I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me."
15. You must set over you a king whom the LORD your God will choose; you will set one from among your brothers as king over you. You may not appoint over you a foreigner, one who is not your brother.
16. He shall not multiply to himself horses, nor return the people to Egypt in order to heap up horses, for the LORD has said to you, "You are never again to return by this way."
17. Nor shall he multiply wives to himself, so that his heart will not turn aside, and he shall not greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.

Time after time in the Old Testament, God showed Himself to be supremely meek. He would actually prefer that we have our way instead of His way, if we want it, except that He loves us and knows what our ways lead to (Prov. 11:19; 14:12). But when we are like Him, we prefer His way above our own, and that is safer for us, which pleases Him.

Samuel pleaded with the people not to insist on having an earthly king (1Sam. 8:10–18). But Israel refused to hear him. Samuel warned them that a king would oppress them. “You will cry out in that day because of your king that you have chosen for yourselves,” he protested to them, “but the LORD will not answer you on that day!”

1Samuel 8

19. But the people refused to give heed to the voice of Samuel, and they said,
 “No! But a king shall be over us,
 20a. so that we may be like all the nations.”

After this meeting with the people, Samuel, heavy-hearted, returned to the LORD and told Him what the people had said. And the LORD said to Samuel, “Listen to their voice, and make them a king” (1Sam. 8:22).

Israel wanted a kingdom such as other nations had (1Sam. 8:5, 20), an institution that would represent them to the world, not an anointed man who represented God to them. And so, in spite of Samuel’s earnest protests, when the Israelites insisted on being “like all the nations”, God gave them their earthly kingdom.

Paul said that the stories written in the Old Testament were written so that New Testament believers could learn from them (Rom. 15:4). However, New Testament believers failed to heed Israel’s bad example of demanding an institution. Israel’s example is a warning to us that if pushed to do it, God will allow His people to reject Him and form an institution for themselves instead. If they do not want to follow His lead, God will back away and let His people choose their own leaders, formulate their own doctrines, and set their own standards of conduct and worship. The Father will not force Himself on His children. But at what price do we drive Him away?

ISRAEL’S SECOND SELF-WILLED INSTITUTION: JUDAISM

There has never been a lack of religious activity in the world, but when worshippers are wicked, God detests whatever form of worship they offer Him (Prov. 21:27). The point of the law and its ceremonies was to guide Israel in righteousness so that they could worship God acceptably, as well as recognize the Son when he came. It frustrated God, and He bitterly complained about it, when He saw Israel using the ceremonial forms He had given them as a cover for sin, and eventually, God came to despise even those holy ceremonies because of it:

Isaiah 1

11. “What is the multitude of your sacrifices to me?” says the LORD. “I am glutted with burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fatlings, and I take no pleasure in the blood of bullocks, and young rams, and he-goats.
 12. Who has required you to trample my courts when you come to appear before me?”

13. Stop bringing worthless offerings! Incense is an abomination to me. New moon, and Sabbaths, and the calling of a convocation, I cannot bear. The sacred Assembly is nothing to me.
14. Your new moons and your appointed feasts, my soul hates! They are a burden to me. I have worn myself out bearing *them*.
15. And when you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you. Though you make many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood!”

God gave Israel all those ceremonial forms that Isaiah just mentioned, but because of Israel’s sinfulness, He hated their observance of them.

Contrary to what one might expect, whenever the Israelites forsook God’s moral commandments, they became more religious, not less. But that has been the way of all mankind from the beginning; it is by no means just a characteristic of ancient Israel. Where a clear conscience is lacking, ceremonial form fills the void. Ceremonies are a placebo for the sinful; men perform religious ceremonies and imagine they are better for it, when nothing has changed. If we define “religion” as nothing more than ceremonial form, nothing more than an illusion of righteousness, then what Karl Marx said about religion is true:

The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is a demand for their true happiness. The call to abandon illusions about their condition is the call to abandon a condition which requires illusions.¹³⁰

Social philosophers such as Karl Marx miss the mark by thinking that unjust social conditions is what drives men to the illusory comfort of religion, but there is, in Christ Jesus, a “pure and undefiled religion before God” (Jas. 1:27) of which Marx was completely ignorant, and that kind of religion is no illusion at all. It is instead the end of man’s illusions and the beginning of true life for him. The spiritual condition of hypocrisy, not man’s social condition, is what compels humans to resort to illusions, and without God’s kind of righteousness, humans cling to the illusion of righteousness that ceremonial forms provide them as desperately as a shipwrecked mariner clings to a piece of wood.

When the Son came into the world, the elders of Israel were clinging to proper ceremonial form and were neglecting, said Jesus, “the weightier matters of the law: justice, and mercy, and faith” (Mt. 23:23). The Jewish elders had become representatives of an institution rather than of God. Their particular Institution, Judaism, was a mixture of the holy law of Moses and the traditions of the elders, a blending that took place during the centuries immediately prior to the Son’s coming. Just as the Son represented God and *was* God, Israel’s leaders represented the Institution and *were* the Institution.

During those centuries, the people of Israel grew accustomed to the Institution. They were taught by the men of the Institution that the Institution was of God, and so they supported both it and them. And those men maintained their influence and control over people by keeping them within the tight confines of the Institution’s forms and traditions. But when the Son of God was

¹³⁰ Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s “Philosophy of Right”*, translated by Annette Jolin and Joseph O’Malley. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 131.

revealed, he broke open the gates of the Institution and called upon God's people to make a choice they had never before been given, the choice of life instead of form!

The longer institutions stand, the more stable and secure they appear. Very old religious institutions exude an aura of sanctity which provides people with a false sense of security, "the illusory happiness" of which Marx spoke. Regardless of how long any institution exists, however, it cannot replace God's representatives because *God does not anoint and send institutions; He anoints and sends people*. Each generation of God's people faces a greater temptation to go the way of the Institution instead of hearing the messengers of God because with each generation, revered institutions grow older and more revered.

NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVERS' SELF-WILLED INSTITUTION:
CHRISTIANITY

As we saw in Chapter 8, even during the days of the apostles, believers began falling away from the unity they had in the Spirit (1Cor. 1:10–13). After the apostles, as Paul predicted, the men who wanted an institution became much bolder:

Acts 20

29. I know this, that after my departure, vicious wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.
30. Even from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things so as to draw away disciples after themselves.
31. Therefore, be on guard, and remember that for three years, night and day, I did not cease from warning each one *of you* with tears.

These "wolves" are the men who led God's children toward institutionalized religion and away from the life that Christ had suffered and died for us to have. The title that those men eventually gave to their institution, Christianity, was itself a lie, for it was not of Christ and did not represent him. In the first three centuries AD, God's people endured horrific times of great persecution, but with the rise of the Institution, they were at last freed from their fear of persecution by the Empire – as long as they submitted to its new Institution.¹³¹ But to be sure, there was plenty of persecution to come for those who would not submit, and men of the Institution, with the might of Rome now at their disposal, became the most zealous persecutors of God's representatives ever to arise. *Christianity was to become the fiercest enemy of the true God and His Son ever to exist on the earth*. The god of Christianity redefined the gospel so that a heretic was redefined as someone not of the Institution, which has included many a true man of God from that time to this.

When Rome established Christianity as the norm for those who believe in Jesus, the whole world accepted Christianity as the faith that represents Christ. The world was content to do that because the god of Christianity is one of their own; that is, a god of form. The fact that Satan

¹³¹ In his sycophantic "Oration in Praise of Constantine", Eusebius, the father of church history, linked in an intimate way the rule of Rome to the rule of God. Eusebius' euphoria over Constantine's exaltation of himself to a position equal with the apostles borders on the hysterical, but the record of it is valuable because it provides us with insight into how giddy many believers of that time were, that the Empire which had for so long abused them now embraced the faith of Jesus (with some modifications approved of by the Emperor). Even to this day, Eastern Orthodox Christianity reveres Constantine as *Isapostolos* ("equal of the apostles").

“deceived the whole world” (Rev. 12:9) does not mean that he persuaded the whole world to join his Christian Institution. It means only that he persuaded the whole world to believe that the Institution represents Christ.

It was an easy sell. This world prefers any institution to God’s kind of life and will accept into its pantheon any god that is worshipped in form. But because the world is thus deceived, God’s true representatives are frowned upon – not just by Christians but also by the world – because they are alive to God and do not represent any institution. Preacher Clark once made this arresting statement to his congregation: “I’m just a sheep in wolf’s clothing.” In other words, “I know how bad I look, but if you look beyond what your eyes can see, you will see that I am good.” That’s how it is in this world with messengers truly sent by God.

INSTITUTIONALIZED SLANDER

The mere existence of the Institution, with age lending weight to its claims, condemns true men of God without words. Those who belong to the Institution do not even have to dirty their hands to protest against true messengers of God. Merely by continuing in the Institution’s forms, without uttering a word against any man of God, they maintain their appearance of righteousness and bolster their claim to be the representatives of Christ. This is what I call “institutionalized slander”, and it is Satan’s most effective weapon against God’s servants. This is how the Lord described it to me some years ago: “When a lie becomes the norm, normal people become liars.” And when normal people become liars, God’s messengers are condemned because they tell the truth.

Men of the Institution perpetuate old, revered forms, and then let those forms tacitly condemn anyone who does not participate in them. These sons of the Accuser hide their lack of ordination from God behind those forms, and from their lofty perch within the Institution, with an appearance of fatherly concern, they caution their flocks against eating of the green pastures outside the walls of the Institution. They point to the vast multitudes who belong to the Institution, and to the vast multitudes who have belonged to it over the millennia, and then ask, “How could so many people be wrong?” But the wise will answer, “If the Lord said that few will find the way of life, then how could so many people be right?”

The world’s professional religious leaders have always known, better than God’s children know, how to make an impressive show (Lk. 16:8) because form, not life, is what sustains their institutions. The simple forms that God gave to Old Testament Israel to foreshadow His Son could not compete with the grandiose displays of religious devotion found in ancient heathen cultures, and those simple forms of God’s law were an embarrassment to those in Israel who wanted to “be like all the nations”. Humility was required of those who kept God’s law. The pride in human nature, however, demanded more ceremony, pomp, and style than God ordained. For example, when Judah’s King Ahaz traveled to Damascus to meet with an Assyrian king, he was enamored of the intricately carved altar he saw there, and he sent orders to the priest in Jerusalem to move God’s plain, uncarved altar to the side to make room for one like the fancy one in Damascus (2Kgs. 16:10–15). The plain altar before God’s temple at Jerusalem, upon which the sins of many a soul in Israel had been consumed with the fires of acceptable sacrifices, could not compete in beauty with that heathen altar in Damascus. But God was not trying to compete; He was only providing a way for sins to be forgiven. Israel, in the end, failed in her

walk with God, not because God's law was so demanding that they could not measure up but because it was so simple they could not believe it.

When the Son of God brought about this New Covenant, the way of salvation did not become more stylish and sophisticated than before; it became simpler than ever. This covenant of life is so simple, in fact, that even fools need not err if they walk in it (Isa. 35:8). How much simpler could God make the way of salvation than to require membership in nothing but His family, and no ceremony, no proper form, no social status, no talent, no physical strength or beauty, and no money? All that is required in this New Covenant is faith in God's Son, Jesus.

The animal and food sacrifices God required of Israel were few and simple, but the very simplicity of those sacrifices challenged the pride of man. How much more does the simplicity of Christ challenge that pride? How much easier it has proved for men to offer dead animals to God than for men to offer themselves to God as "living sacrifices"! As Uncle Joe once put it, "It takes more humility to be a sacrifice than to make one."

It was because God's way was an embarrassment to them that Israel wanted "to be like all the nations." God's simple way is still an embarrassment to those among His people who want to "be like all the *denominations*". Christianity is "the broad way that leads to destruction", and many choose it (Mt. 7:13), and because of the many who go that way, "the way of truth shall be spoken evil of" (2Pet. 2:2b). Only those few who desire life more than form are satisfied with the sincere, unpretentious, "strait and narrow way" of Jesus. As one brother recently testified, "If you want to be right with God, you have to want to be right with God more than you want to be right." Desire for God's favor more than man's is the narrow way that leads to eternal life, "and there are just a few who find it" (Mt. 7:14).

THE BASIC DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE OLD AND THE NEW

The Israel of the Old Testament was a fleshly nation that worshipped in symbolic forms and fought physical battles with carnal weapons. The New Testament "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16) is a spiritual nation that worships in life and wages its warfare with the "powerful weapons" of the Spirit (2Cor. 10:4). The ceremonial forms of the Old Testament prepared God's people for the *first* coming of the Son. The life of the New Testament prepares God's people for the *second* coming of the Son. Under the law, men served God in their own will and strength, but not in this covenant. In this covenant, men can only serve God in *His* will and strength. Paul told the saints at Philippi, "It is God who is working within you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phip. 2:13).

In this covenant, as my father once said, "What God requires, requires God."

God lamented through Hosea (4:6), "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge!" This is still the case. God's people do not understand the fundamental difference between the two covenants, and they do not understand that difference because they believe that the Institution of Christianity represents Christ. As a result of believing that lie, Satan's most successful lie in human history, God's people are still being destroyed for lack of knowledge. Paul's question to his beloved Galatian converts when they turned from worshipping God in life to worshipping Him in form, is still relevant for those who have received God's life but have joined the Institution: "Having begun in *the* Spirit, are you now perfected by *the* flesh?" (Gal. 3:3).

The ceremonial forms of the law were given by God, but none of the ceremonial forms of Christianity came from God. Whether the forms are given by God or not, however, to worship in form is to miss the whole point of Christ. *The Son of God came to give men life, not more symbols of it.* We submit to Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives only as we walk in the life he has given, and we deny Christ whenever we serve God any other way. How we worship shapes everything about us (Pss. 115:4–8; 135:15–18). Worshipping in God’s life makes us ever more alive (Prov. 4:18; Jn. 16:13), and worshipping in form makes us deader and deader to the things of God and distorts our understanding of everything.

In the law of Moses, God went into great detail when He told His people how to worship Him. He gave them commandments concerning the size, the shape, the materials to be used, and who would build the tabernacle and its furnishings (Ex. 25–31), including great details concerning the priests’ garments, the ingredients of the holy anointing oil, and the incense to be used in His worship, adding that “whoever makes any like it shall be cut off from his people” (Ex. 30:33; 38). When Aaron’s two oldest sons burned their own kind of incense on God’s altar, God struck them both dead (Lev. 10:1–2).

The law contains many minute details related to worship and daily life. If the New Covenant is indeed a greater covenant, and if it is, like the old one, a covenant of form, shouldn’t there be a greater number of rules, with more specific details, so that we could be certain to render unto God greater service? But no instructions can be found in the New Testament concerning how to carry out a ceremonial form. And the reason no such instructions can be found is because in this covenant, there are no ceremonies to keep. Every one of the ceremonies Christians observe today came from men, not God, and those rites honor the men who devised them instead of honoring God.

The Old Testament’s ceremonies were like candy wrappers, which have no value except for what they conceal. Once a wrapper is opened and the candy revealed, sensible people discard the wrapper and eat the candy. Likewise, with the Son revealed, wise people cease worshipping in ceremony and begin to eat and drink of the Son, as he commanded us to do (Jn. 6:53–58). With the Son revealed, it is as foolish to continue worshipping in ceremony as it would be to eat the candy wrapper instead of the candy. But beyond the senselessness of it, to worship in ceremony after the Son has been revealed is to deny by our actions that what he did for us is sufficient. The essential element of Paul’s gospel was that faith in Jesus Christ alone is sufficient for salvation. If God commanded Israel not to add one word to the law that Moses had given them (Dt. 4:2; 12:32), how much less does He want us to add anything to the Spirit that His Son has given us?

The wrapper of the law has been opened! The sweet Son of God is no longer hidden! The wrapper is not better than the candy; it has no power to satisfy our hunger and thirst for God and His righteousness. And because the Son is revealed, “all men everywhere” are now commanded to repent (Acts 17:30) and to “taste and see that the LORD is good” (Ps. 34:8).

If we are wise, we will put our trust in Jesus alone and refuse everything the Institution has to offer, – its ceremonies, its doctrines, its traditions, and its ministers. When Paul told the saints in Colossae that they were “complete in Christ” (Col. 2:10), he was reminding them that (1) everything that Christ had done for their souls was done in the Spirit and (2) only what Christ had done for their souls was worth anything.

Uncle Joe once testified that God stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son Isaac (Gen. 22) because Abraham was making God jealous. Uncle Joe said, “God was the only one with a Son worthy to be sacrificed for sin.” It is from that perspective that Paul asked, “Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?” (1Cor. 10:22). We risk provoking the Lord to jealousy when we add to Christ’s baptism of life the Institution’s baptism with lifeless water, or when we add to the Son’s communion in life the Institution’s communion with lifeless, earthly food and drink, or when we add to the Son’s spiritual garments of praise and righteousness the Institution’s carnal ceremonial robes. *In this covenant, only God’s Son has authority from God to baptize, to give communion, or to clothe the saints for worship.* For men of the Institution to add ceremonies to the worship of God is for them to claim the Son’s authority; it is treason against Christ.

Under Moses’ law, God sanctified people, but He also sanctified lifeless things, such things as water, clothing, oil, and incense, to be used in the holy ceremonies which the law required. But in this covenant of life, God sanctifies nothing but people. That is why, in this covenant, there are no holy places on earth, no holy days, no holy garments, and no holy instruments of ministry. This is also why ceremonies are no longer acceptable to God. To be holy, a ceremony needs holy things, and in this covenant, God has made no “thing” holy.

“THE CUP OF THE LORD AND THE CUP OF DEMONS”

While on earth, the Son told his disciples that he was living on a kind of food they knew nothing about (Jn. 4:32). At a later time, he went further by explaining that he was living on the Father, and then he declared that whoever wanted to live forever would have to live on him!

John 6

54. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up in the last day.

...

56. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.

57. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live by the Father, so he who eats me shall also live by me.

Jesus did not leave his disciples wondering what he meant. Seeing their confusion, he went on to explain that he was not speaking of eating the fleshly body of Mary’s son, but of consuming the spiritual life that was sent from heaven, the Son of God.

63. It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh is worthless. The words that I am speaking to you, they are spirit, and they are life.

But in this case, Jesus’ effort to explain things of the Spirit to people without the Spirit sometimes only made matters worse. The explanation was harder on them than the parable itself. If Jesus had left them puzzled, as usual, they might have stayed with him a little longer. But as it was, “from that time, many of his disciples left and went back, and walked with him no longer” (Jn. 6:66).

It is at this very point that many followers of Jesus today turn away from him and choose the Institution, preferring the wrapper over the candy, and form over life. Communion with God is

communion with His feelings and thoughts; it has nothing to do with wafers and wine. Communion with God is the knowledge of God that His kind of life brings into our hearts, and it is in spirit, not in form. The acting out of a ceremonial meal with Satan's sons in the Institution is the kind of communion that Christians ignorantly enjoy with Satan, not with God, and Paul warned God's children to stay away from it:

1Corinthians 10

21. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

If the cup and table of the Lord is fellowship with God's feelings and thoughts, then the cup and table of demons is fellowship with Satan's feelings and thoughts. The Institution's communion cup is the cup of demons; it is an imitation of God's communion. We worship God acceptably only as we worship in life because the Son ministers life. He baptizes us with life (1Cor. 12:13); he buries us in life, and then raises us up into more life (Col. 2:12); and with the sharp sword of eternal life, he circumcises our hearts from faith in form (Rom. 2:28–29) and “purges our conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb. 9:14). (A purged conscience is unafraid to leave off dead works; on the contrary, it is thankful to be free of them.) The Son washes our souls with God's life so that we may stand “blameless in holiness before our God and Father” (1Thess. 3:13). No ceremony can do that, whether God gave it or not. This is the knowledge that motivated Paul's comment, “We are the circumcision who serve God in spirit, and boast in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh” (Phip. 3:3).

“SEVEN PILLARS”

David prophesied that the New Testament house of God would be built upon “Seven Pillars”:

Proverbs 9

1. Wisdom has built her house [the body of Christ]; she has hewn out her seven pillars.
2. She has slaughtered her beasts [our fleshly nature]; she has mixed her wine [the “new wine” of the Spirit]; and she has set her table [communion with the Father and the Son].

Paul revealed what these “Seven Pillars” are in Ephesians 4:4–6. He said that in the kingdom of God, there is but ONE God, the Father. He continued by saying that there is but ONE Lord, Jesus Christ. The next pillar is the ONE Faith, and there being one Faith means that every faith except that one is false. There is but ONE Spirit, which is God's life. There is only ONE Baptism in God's kingdom, that of the Spirit, and every baptism of man is a worthless wetting of the flesh. There is but ONE Body, made up of Spirit-baptized saints, and it is not something that men can join or organize. Finally, there is but ONE Hope, the hope that Jesus will come again to take us away to our eternal home. These Seven Pillars serve as the foundation for the entire New Testament of Jesus Christ, and Paul, as a “wise master-builder”, laid it out for us (1Cor. 3:10). Upon these unshakable Seven Pillars, the body of Christ is built up as a “spiritual house” in which are offered “spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1Pet. 2:5).

No institution can do for us what these Seven Pillars will do when they are understood and put into practice. And nothing but putting them into practice will purify the body of Christ from every “spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing”.

“WORKS OF THE ACCUSER”¹³²

John said, “For this reason was the Son of God revealed, to destroy the works of the Accuser” (1Jn. 3:8b). But what are “works of the Accuser”? They are not such things as murder, thievery, and fornication, for men whom Jesus called sons of the Accuser despised murderers, thieves, and fornicators, even to the point of wanting to kill them (e.g., Jn. 8:1–11). Satan’s sons were admired in Israel as paragons of righteousness, but they were paragons of human righteousness, not God’s. Jesus told them, “You are of *your* father the Accuser, and you want to do the lusts of your father” (Jn. 8:44). This was an astonishing assessment of those respected leaders in Israel, but through the eyes of God, Jesus was able to see those men doing exactly what Satan was doing – enforcing the human righteousness of the law. They, like Satan their father, occupied a high position in God’s order. They were anointed by God to occupy those positions, and they wielded authority over God’s people which even Jesus acknowledged:

Matthew 23

1. Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples,
2. saying, “The scribes and Pharisees are sitting on Moses’ seat.
- 3a. Therefore, whatsoever they tell you to observe, observe and do.”

If these deeply religious men were doing what Satan wanted done, as Jesus said, then we need to pay attention to what they were doing if we want to know what Satan is really like. In Matthew 23, Jesus gave a partial list of their activities:

- They made public displays of their faith so that men would admire them for their devotion to God (v. 5).
- They sat in the most prestigious seats at public meetings (v. 6).
- They received titles and honor from men (v. 7).
- They made long, public prayers (v. 14).
- They traveled to distant places to convert others to their Institution (v. 15).
- They built tombs and monuments in honor of dead men of God (vv. 29–31).
- They hated and envied living men of God (v. 34).

Satan despises harlots, drug addicts, anarchists, vandals, thieves, and other socially unacceptable characters. The immoral, oddball people in our time who call themselves Satan worshippers are a pathetic joke to Satan, and Satan’s ministers despise them. The way of Satanism is no more the way of Satan than the way of Christianity is the way of Christ. If Satan were human, he would be a clean-cut, law-and-order guy who would feed your dog and watch over your property for you when you go out of town. If he were your neighbor, you’d like him. Humans cannot hate the real Satan; their ways, when they are “good”, are too much like his. The Satan that men hate is the Satan that medieval Christian myth-makers invented.

¹³² This is usually translated, “works of the Devil”, but see Footnotes 8 and 55, pages 16 and 176.

By nature, people in this world prefer the ways of Satan to the ways of God. Both Satan and humans prefer form over life, and they prefer an institution with respectable forms so that God's kind of life may be respectably excluded. When Satan was cast out of heaven, a voice in heaven cried out, "Alas, earth and sea! For the Accuser has come down among you!" (Rev. 12:12b). That sympathetic cry, however, did not come just because innocent earthlings were about to be attacked by the big bad wolf; it came because the people of earth were finally being given the one they really wanted, the god of proper form, the master of good appearances.

The traditional Christian picture of Satan as a hideous figure with horns and a pitchfork who goes around trying to get people to commit adultery, murder, and the like is false.¹³³ It is a picture of Satan that the flesh likes because if Satan is like that, the flesh can congratulate itself on how good it is, by comparison. It is an image of Satan inspired by Satan himself. The real Satan is nothing like the Satan that medieval Christianity invented, and as long as people believe in that Satan, they will never be able to understand what works of the Accuser really are.

It was one of Satan's chief works while he was in heaven to maintain his appearance of righteousness, and as we have seen, Satan did many things that were right. He appeared to be an obedient servant of God, but his heart was corrupted by pride and covetousness. The same is true of his sons. They do many good deeds; however, like their father, they are proud, self-willed, and "full of extortion and wickedness" (Lk. 11:39). They are enforcers of "a form of godliness" (2Tim. 3:5), and they use ceremonial forms to keep people in bondage to their Institution. They exalt the traditions of their Institution to the level of God's commandments, and sometimes, even above them (Mt. 15:1-6). They seduce God's people into their net with false hope (Amos 5:18; Jer. 6:14), and then they use those souls as merchandise (2Pet. 2:1-3).

Nothing can deliver man from his bondage to form except the power of God's life. Everyone, everywhere on earth, is addicted to form except for where the Son of God has been revealed. Men of the Institution have fought with one another, many times to the death, in defense of their particular forms, thinking they were doing God service. But those who live in the world of forms are dead already, whether they fight for them or not. In hearts where the Son of God reigns, the Accuser and his works are cast out, just as Jesus cast them out of heaven. And because the Son of God purged heaven, no more works of the Accuser are there. But plenty of works of the Accuser are here on earth because that is where he and his angels now dwell.

One reason Satan was able to deceive the entire world (Rev. 12:9; 1Jn. 5:19) is that when he was cast down to earth, humans already loved form. They were already living insincerely, the way Satan had been living in heaven, judging themselves and others by appearances and assuming that God was just like them. This is why I said that when Satan was cast down to earth, mankind received from God the one they wanted. Nothing on earth changed much when Satan came to dwell here because the people of earth were already so much like him. The ungodly were as prepared to receive Satan as *their* lord when he was cast down to earth as the righteous were prepared to receive the Son as *their* Lord when he was sent down to earth. Satan's change of residence did not cause the human addiction to ceremonial forms. Humans

¹³³ In Western culture's depictions of Jesus and Satan, Jesus is usually handsome and the Accuser (the Devil) is usually very ugly. Both are contrary to the scriptures. Isaiah states that the Messiah would be homely (Isa. 53:2), while Ezekiel says that Satan is "perfect in beauty" (Ezek. 28:12).

had been living by appearances since Cain impertinently asked God, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen. 4:9).

ANYTHING CAN BE SIN

Humans love form because they can use form to hide their true nature. Ceremonies can be performed with no repentance toward God, no humility, no love for the truth, and no hunger for God’s righteousness. Institutionalized religion requires no life from God in order to exist; it requires only that people carry out its forms. The most ungodly of humans can conduct ceremonies and then *say* that the work of God has been accomplished, but nothing is the work of God except the work of God, and everything God does, He does by His Spirit. Neither He nor His Son have ever performed a ceremony. God alone accomplishes what needs to be accomplished in man’s soul, and if the Spirit is not doing the work, then God is not doing the work. Men of the Institution have to perform ceremonies to cloak the fact that God is not involved. If God were involved, the ceremony would get in His way.

Anything can be sin because anything can become a form. Shouting “Hallelujah” and “Praise God” can be as lifeless a form as a Catholic mass. Playing loud, fast gospel music can become a form. Raising one’s hands to heaven can become a form. Pentecostals and Charismatics sometimes assume that their worship is holy and acceptable because it is loud and demonstrative, but any style of worship is a form when the worshippers are not being led by the Spirit. To be sure, God’s people are exhorted to shout His praise and to worship Him with music and dancing and a loud noise (Pss. 33:3; 98:4), but they also are exhorted to “be still, and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10). No man knows when God’s people should worship God with music and dancing and when they should be still before Him. That is why being led by the Spirit is critical to righteousness and acceptable worship.

On the other hand, nothing done under the unction of the Spirit *can* be sinful because the Spirit is God’s life, and God is always holy and good. Apparently, some Corinthian believers were concerned that when they spoke in tongues, they might be saying something bad about Jesus. But Paul let them know that they had no need to worry, explaining that “no one speaking in the Spirit is saying, ‘Jesus is accursed’” (1Cor. 12:3). So, those speaking in tongues might not know what they are saying (1Cor. 14:14), but whatever the Spirit is saying is good (Rom. 8:26).

When the Spirit is in control, God is in control, and it is God’s control that the flesh does not understand or want. But by ceremonial forms, men control their gods. Within the Christian Institution, home of many Gods and many Jesuses, the Baptists tell their God and their Jesus, the Presbyterians tell their God and their Jesus, the Catholics theirs, etc., when and how often they will have communion and whether they will use real wine or grape juice. They set the date and the time when their Gods and Jesuses will baptize people with water. They tell their Gods and Jesuses who will be the pastor, what doctrine the pastor will teach, and for how much money he will minister,¹³⁴ and they tell their Gods and their Jesuses whom they will accept into the church and whom they will cast out. Man is in control of every god that is worshipped with form because man is in control of the form. But the living God is in command among those who are

¹³⁴ For a complete treatment of the subject of a pastor’s wages, see my book, *Tithes and Offerings: The Right Relationship between a Pastor and His Congregation*, available for online reading at GoingtoJesus.com.

led by His Spirit. In God's kingdom, God decides when He will have communion with His people, and how often, and it is always in the Spirit. He alone decides who and when to baptize with His life. He alone decides whom He will ordain to minister to His children, what those ministers will preach, how much money they will have for their labor, and He alone decides whom He will take into His kingdom and whom He will cast out. The true God takes orders from nobody. He "works all things according to the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11), and He does it by His Spirit.

RESTRAINT

We do not throw the baby out with the bath water. Religious forms are contrary to God and His Son, but in a world of sinners, social forms are necessary. A society's accepted forms of fair dealing and etiquette, for example, are beneficial because they help avoid conflict. Forms of peace agreed upon by nations are also beneficial because they keep nations from waging war against one another. But earthly peace treaties are only a form of peace. God said, "There is no peace to the wicked" (Isa. 48:22), and God is right. The condition that men call peace is only a form, beneath which seethes the same envy and strife that led to war in the first place. No matter what men claim, strife is embedded in their nature, and their kind of peace only appears to be peaceful. It is when sinful men fight and hurt one another that they are being true to their nature; when they smile and shake hands, they are lying. Jesus refused to trust human confessions of faith because "he knew what was in man" (Jn. 2:23–25). Still, so long as social forms of courtesy and peace are maintained, people benefit because no one gets hurt.

Religious, political, and social forms play crucial roles in restraining sinful man from acting according to his fallen nature, much as a fence or a chain restrains an aggressive dog. Such forms can prevent rash actions springing from passion, as well as other evil actions based on maliciousness, covetousness, or the like. When governments or societies become unstable or collapse, the restraint of forms is loosened, and the beastly nature of man shows itself. In even the most civilized of societies, when social forms are no longer enforced, anarchy is the inevitable result. If human passions are not restrained by the enforcement of acceptable forms, people will fall into conflict, which will continue until they agree on another form of peace. Despite the many times that scenario has been repeated, most humans still trust in form and will not repent and turn to God. No war on earth has ever ended with the warring nations coming together to plead with God to give them His kind of life so that wars will not return. Instead, men sign treaties and trust again in a form of peace, preserving until a later time the hatred and strife that is in their nature.

To control passions, societies attach ceremonial form to every significant event in life – birth, death, marriage, graduation, retirement, etc. Anniversaries of the birth or death of notable figures, dates of significant national events, and religious holidays are also celebrated with special forms in order to entertain the masses – a parade for this event, costumes for another, feasting and gift-giving for another, and so forth. A large percentage of the world's commercial wealth is dependent upon their selling goods and services connected with such forms as Christmas. When the Beast of John's Revelation does away with the Great Whore, Christianity (Rev. 17:16), merchants around the world will mourn the end of her forms because her forms brought them so much revenue (Rev. 18:15–19). Apparently, the new form of order that the

Beast will establish on the earth will not be as lucrative for the merchants of earth as those of the Great Whore. Nevertheless, his new form of order will restrain the beastly nature of man better than she did.

GETTING RID OF THE SON

By “getting rid of the Son”, I mean getting rid of his influence. Nobody can get rid of God’s Son because no creature can get rid of their Creator. Men of the Institution tried to get rid of the Son by killing him when he was here among us, and they succeeded – except for the resurrection. Death could not hold the Prince of life (Acts 2:24). Still, even after the resurrection, men of the Institution continued to try to get rid of the Son, but this time spiritually, by introducing ceremonies to the gospel of Christ. As Satan’s first attempt to get rid of the Son was made with a Roman cross, so, his second was made with an Institution.

Satan’s warfare against the Son is waged by all branches of his Institution, from the most liberal wing to the most conservative. Liberal Christian theologians deny the Son in various ways, even sometimes by insisting that biblical writers invented the very idea of a Son dwelling with the Father from the beginning or that Jesus being the Son of God is a doctrine that developed only after Jesus died. Most conservative Christians, on the other hand, try to get rid of the Son by blending him with the Father, either with the doctrine of the Holy Trinity or by the Oneness doctrine. So, both liberal and conservative Christian doctrines lead to the same end. They all lead men to believe that in the beginning, God did not create a Son to live with Him as a separate being. Liberal and conservative Christians may oppose and sometimes despise each other; however, Satan uses them all alike to deny the Father *and* the Son, and that error is an essential element of the spirit of antichrist:

1John 2

22b. He is the antichrist, who denies the Father and the Son.

...

24. Let what you have heard from the beginning continue in you. If what you have heard from the beginning continues in you, then you will continue in the Son and in the Father.

Nowhere within the Institution of Christianity is the truth of the Father and the Son being taught. Christian ministers cannot proclaim that truth because the truth about the Son would put an end to their Institution. No common ground exists between the Spirit and the Institution because no harmony exists between life and form.

Where no common ground exists, there can be no influence. The truth makes people free because the truth removes from the heart all common ground with whatever is a lie. When Jesus said that Satan had nothing in him (Jn. 14:30), he meant that he and Satan had nothing in common. We often hear the phrase, “sitting on the fence”, but in the spiritual world, such a fence does not exist, at least, as we commonly think of it. James said that if we obey almost all of God’s commandments, then we are guilty of disobeying them all (Jas. 2:10), and Paul leaves us no fence to sit on between spiritual darkness and spiritual light.

2Corinthians 6

- 14b. What is there in common between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship *has* light with darkness?
15. What harmony *exists* between Christ and Belial? Or what part *has* a believer with an unbeliever?
- 16a. What agreement *has* the temple of God with idols?

Everything in the universe is either good or evil. No creature is half good and half evil. Lukewarmness is not a spiritual condition somewhere between good and evil; it is evil of the worst kind. Those who are openly good or openly evil are real, but those who are lukewarm hide their wickedness behind an appearance of righteousness. That is why lukewarmness is an abomination to Christ (Rev. 3:16). Jesus can deal with those who are honest and open about who they are, whether they be good or evil. But hypocrites will not admit, even to themselves, what they are, and Jesus can do them no good. They fear God too much to give in completely to the world, and they love the world too much to give in completely to God.

To believe in Jesus 99 percent is to be 100 percent foolish. There is no maybe in either the Father or the Son, no hesitance, no iffiness.

2Corinthians 1

19. Jesus Christ, the Son of God who was preached among you by us – by me, Silvanus, and Timothy – was not yes and no. Not at all! In him is yes!
- 20a. For however many God's promises *are*, in him they are yes!

Regardless of how it may appear, there are only good people and evil people on the earth. That is all. Jesus said, "He who is not with me is against me" (Mt. 12:30), and to make it doubly clear, he also said the opposite: "He who is not against us is for us" (Lk. 9:50). The good are those who are completely for the Son of God, and the evil are any who are not, including the lukewarm, to whom Jesus said,

Matthew 15

7. *You* hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied well concerning you, saying,
8. "This people draws near to me with their mouth, and with their lips they honor me, but their heart is far from me.
9. In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

One means of diminishing the influence of the Son is to add the deadness of ceremony to the worship of God. When Paul said that the flesh is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit is contrary to the flesh, he was saying that ceremony is contrary to God's life, and God's life is contrary to ceremony. God's life is too great and too good to quench, even for an hour so that a ceremony can be performed. Paul told the saints not to quench the Spirit (1Thess. 5:19), for the one who quenches the Spirit to fit in with the Institution has "trampled under foot the Son of God, has esteemed the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified *to be* a common thing, and has done outrage to the Spirit of grace" (Heb. 10:29). Jesus would rather that we set him aside altogether than set him aside an hour at a time. Those who do not have God's kind of life cannot worship Him "in spirit and in truth" at all. But those who have it, and then worship Him in spirit

some of the time and in ceremony *some* of the time, are in an even darker place. Were the prophet Elijah alive today, he would ask those people, as he asked those of his day who worshipped both God and Baal, “How long will you hobble around on two opinions?” (1Kgs. 18:21).

GETTING RID OF THE SONS

When the Father poured out His life on believers at Pentecost, the “incorruptible seed” of God created *many* sons of God on earth – a big problem for Satan. Satan’s mission then had to be adjusted from merely getting rid of God’s Son to getting rid of God’s *sons*:

Revelation 12

13a. The dragon saw that he was thrown *down* to the earth,

...

17. and the dragon was enraged . . . and he went away to make war against . . . those who keep the commandments of God and have the witness of Jesus.

The history of the Institution, church history, abundantly demonstrates that no punishment is too cruel, as far as Satan’s sons are concerned, for God’s sons who love the life of the Spirit and reject the Institution’s “forms of godliness”. Just as sons of the Accuser put God’s Son to death, so they have put many other sons of God to death. The resurrection of the Son thwarted their purpose against him, and their purpose against God’s other sons will also fail because another resurrection is coming. Death cannot hold anyone who has the life of God. Jesus was the first to prove that (Acts 2:24), and the rest of God’s sons will prove it when their turn comes to rise from the dead. Over the centuries, it has been very difficult for the men of the Institution to maintain an appearance of righteousness while cruelly persecuting and killing innocent saints. They have rationalized their resorting to worldly power with convoluted theologies, but they have never been able to make it right.

Still, Satan’s most effective way of getting rid of the sons of God has not been by killing them physically; it has been by killing their influence. Preacher Clark taught us that slander is spiritual murder, for those who are slandered might as well be dead, as far as their influence in this life is concerned. The Institution’s method of slandering men of God has already been described in some detail. In sum, that slander is accomplished by filling people with faith in the Institution’s doctrines and ceremonies so that they will not hear the men whom God sends.

GETTING RID OF THE WITNESS

“The Spirit is what bears witness because the Spirit is truth.”

1John 5:6b

The principal method that Satan and his sons use to get rid of God’s Son is by diminishing the influence of the Spirit in people’s lives, for the Son *is* the Spirit (2Cor. 3:17), and it is by the Spirit that the Son enters the hearts of men (Jn. 14:23; 1Jn. 3:24b). In large measure, Satan has accomplished this by persuading men to believe that the Father’s witness to His Son, the holy Spirit, is no longer received the way it was received in the beginning. On the day of Pentecost, when Jesus’ followers received the Spirit, they all began to speak in tongues. However, almost every minister of the Institution now teaches that such is no longer the case – and they must do

so. Christianity relies upon this teaching more than any other to maintain its influence, for (1) if the body of Christ is made up only of those who have received the holy Spirit, and (2) if all who receive the holy Spirit speak in tongues when they receive it, then the Institution of Christianity cannot be the body of Christ and is exposed as a fraud.

Paul taught that no one can say (with the knowledge that he is telling the truth) that Jesus is Lord without receiving God's witness to His Son (1Cor. 12:3). Paul said this because he knew that no one had been in heaven to actually see the risen Christ accepted and glorified by His Father, and so, it is only by receiving the Father's witness of that event, the Spirit, that anyone can *know* that Jesus has been glorified to sit at God's right hand. Men can strongly believe in that event even if they do not have the Spirit, just as they may strongly believe that George Washington was the first President of the United States, but they cannot *know* that Jesus "has been made both Lord and Christ" unless they receive God's witness of it. And "stammering lips and another tongue" is the promised evidence that one has received that divine witness:

Isaiah 28 (See also 1Corinthians 14:21–22)

11. He shall speak to this people with stammering lips and another tongue,
12. to whom He has said, "This is the rest with which you will cause the weary one to rest," and, "This is the refreshing." Yet, they would not listen.

Even before the first apostles finished their course, however, some had begun teaching that the holy Spirit could be received without the evidence foretold by Isaiah. The apostles tried to protect the saints from those false teachers by reaffirming God's way of letting men know when His Spirit enters a person's heart. This is a critical issue, for if one does not have the real Spirit of God, he is not born again, and does not belong to God (Rom. 8:9).

Jesus coined the phrase, "born again", in a conversation with Nicodemus, and he used the ever-shifting wind to teach that elder of Israel that God has ordained *a constant to attend every new birth experience* – and that one constant is the sound produced by the Spirit when it comes:

John 3

7. Do not marvel that I told you, "You must be born again."
8. The wind blows wherever it will, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it is coming from or where it is going. This is how it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

With that parable, Jesus revealed to Nicodemus that although man cannot know where God's Spirit has been or where it will go, we can know when the Spirit has come *by the sound it produces*. The disciples received this experience on the day of Pentecost when "there came a sound from heaven like a violent, rushing wind" and "they were all filled with holy Spirit, and they began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit moved them to speak" (Acts 2:1–4). This sound of God's wind, this "stammering lips and another tongue", was never intended for just a few disciples. Remember, Jesus said that this is how it is with *everyone* who is born of the Spirit.

Paul was teaching the same revelation Jesus taught about the new birth when he said that the Spirit "testifies" when it comes in, much the same way that an infant cries out when it is born:

Romans 8

15. You did not receive a spirit of slavery, leading back into fear, but you received the spirit of adoption, by which we cry out, “Abba!” (*that is*, “Father!”)
16. The Spirit itself bears witness, together with our spirit, that we are children of God.

When the apostle John explained how to tell the real Spirit of God from the “holy spirit” of false teachers, his doctrine matched that of Jesus and Paul. He told his readers that they could always tell when someone had truly received Christ because the Spirit of God confesses that Christ has entered that fleshly temple:

1John 4

2. By this, the Spirit of God is recognized: every Spirit that confesses Jesus Christ when he has come into flesh is of God,
- 3a. and every spirit that does not confess Jesus Christ when he has come into flesh is not of God.

Notice that all three of these messengers of God, Jesus, Paul, and John, pointed believers to a *sound* as the sign that one has received the Spirit: Jesus, the sound of the blowing wind; Paul, the cry of a newborn baby; and John, the testimony of the Spirit. This testimony is what John was talking about when he wrote, “The Spirit is what bears witness because the Spirit is truth” (1Jn. 5:6b). He went on to say that the Spirit “is God’s witness which He has borne concerning His Son” and that everyone who truly believes the gospel receives it (1Jn. 5:9–10a), concluding with this fearsome warning:

1John 5

- 10b. He who does not believe God has made Him *out to be* a liar because he has not believed in the witness that God has given concerning His Son.

According to this, not to believe in the Spirit that bears verbal witness when Christ enters into a heart is not to believe God’s testimony to His Son, thus making Him out to be a liar. On the other hand, John said in another place that those who receive God’s witness to His Son have openly declared God to be true (Jn. 3:33).

What are we to think, then, of ministers who claim that speaking in tongues has ceased, and who offer men a speechless “holy spirit” instead? Paul reminded the Corinthians that before they came to Christ, they served speechless gods, but that now, they served a God whose Spirit speaks only good things about Jesus:

1Corinthians 12

1. Concerning things of the Spirit, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.
2. You know that when you were Gentiles, you were led, but misled, to voiceless idols.
3. Wherefore, I give you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit is saying, “Jesus is accursed!” And no one can say, “Lord Jesus”, but by the holy Spirit.

By providing the sign of the sound of the Spirit when someone receives it, God has relieved man of the burden of trying to decide who is born again and who is not. God alone knows the hearts (Acts 15:8), and so, we must wait on Him to give us the sound of His Spirit before declaring someone to be born again. If we know that holy sound, we are blessed, as the psalmist said, “Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound; they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of your countenance” (Ps. 89:15). Our faith is to be in *God’s* judgment of men, not our own, and we trust His testimony, not man’s (1Jn. 5:9; Jn. 2:23–25).

The early saints’ knowledge of the importance of the sound of the Spirit helped Peter convince doubtful leaders of the saints in Jerusalem that some Gentiles had been born of God. Peter knew that God had given them the Spirit because he and the six Jewish brothers with him “heard them speak in tongues and magnify God” (Acts 10:46). They were astonished to hear the sound of the Spirit coming from the mouths of Gentiles, but that sound compelled them to accept what God had done. It also compelled some elders among the saints in Jerusalem to accept what God had done. They were displeased that Peter had gone to the Gentiles, but they could not deny Peter’s testimony when he told them,

Acts 11

15. “As I began to speak, the holy spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning.
...
17. Inasmuch, then, as God gave them the same gift *He gave* to us who believed on the Master, Jesus Christ, who was I, that I could withstand God?”
18. When they had heard these things, they fell silent, but then they began glorifying God, saying, “Well, then, God has granted repentance unto life to the Gentiles, too.”

Ministers of the Institution teach that when a person receives the Spirit of God today, Jesus’ sound of the blowing wind, Paul’s sound of the Spirit “crying Abba, Father”, and John’s testimony of the Spirit are no longer heard. Instead, they want men to trust *them* to let people know when they have received the Spirit. They want men to trust the sound of *their* voice, not the sound of the Spirit. But no man has ever been ordained to tell another that he has received the Spirit; that is God’s prerogative, not man’s.

Many of those same unwise ministers have received the real Spirit of God, with the evidence of speaking in other tongues, yet they deny that it is a necessary experience for others. But in denying the need for the sound of the real Spirit of God, these ministers are denying the very Lord who bought them, for we are bought by Christ when we are baptized by Christ and speak in tongues. Multitudes follow these ministers in claiming to be born again without the Spirit’s witness, and it is principally because of that multitude that the truth is slandered and rejected.

2Peter 2

- 1a. There were false prophets among the [Old Testament] people, just as false teachers shall be among you, who shall bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them.

2. And many shall follow their licentious ways, because of whom, the way of truth shall be spoken evil of.

But God warned us through His Son that in this world, only a few would find the path that leads to life (Mt. 7:14). And He warned us through Moses not to follow a multitude in an evil way (Ex. 23:2), adding through Solomon that regardless of how many join together in a wrong thing, it is still a wrong thing, and that those who endorse the wrong thing will suffer the consequences (Prov. 11:21; Rom. 1:32). There is no safety in numbers from the righteous judgment of God.

In every place where ministers of the Institution have gotten rid of the witness of the real Spirit of God, they have also gotten rid of the real Lord Jesus, for “the Lord is the Spirit” (2Cor. 3:17). But it has not been a difficult sell. Whenever the fleshly nature of man is offered a “holy spirit” that is not really holy, it will opt for that one instead of the holy Spirit which God gives “to those who obey Him” (Acts 5:32).

“OUTSIDE THE CAMP”

Because the Institution weakens, divides, and confuses God’s children, God is pleading with them to come out of it:

Revelation 18

4. Then I heard another voice from heaven, saying, “Come out of her, my people, so that you do not participate in her sins, so that you do not receive of her plagues,
5. for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her unrighteous deeds.”

God is calling His children out of Christianity because everyone who joins that Great Whore makes himself partly responsible for her sins against Christ, such as the following:

- Persecuting God’s children.
- Falsely claiming to represent Christ.
- Teaching false doctrines in the name of Jesus.
- Slandering God’s true servants.
- Promoting form, after the Son of God suffered and died to give us life instead.

God does not want His children to share in the Institution’s guilt, for whoever shares her guilt will share her judgment and “receive of her plagues”. The entire Christian Institution is an invention of man, with Satan’s help. It has never given anyone God’s kind of life, has never cleansed a soul, has never created in anyone the knowledge of God, and it never will. From its inception, the Institution has only brought strife and confusion, and until God destroys it (Rev. 17:16–17), that is all it will do. God is not in it. He and His Son have never been in it. And if we ever want to truly know them, we will have to leave her to be where they are.

Hebrews 13

12. Jesus, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered outside the gate.
13. So then, let us go to him outside the camp, bearing his disgrace.

The Father is not calling for us to “go out of her, my people” but “*come* out of her” because He is calling to us from where He is. The Father and the Son are outside the camp of ceremonial form. They dwell in life, and they are calling us to come dwell in life with them. Those who have chosen form over life think it strange that some of us have left the apparent safety of the Christian camp, but we left because we wanted real safety, not the appearance of it.

When Peter prophesied that false teachers would “deny the Lord who bought them” (2Pet. 2:1), he was not saying that they would deny that Jesus is the Lord. If they denied that, they would deceive none of God’s people. And you will notice that the Lord whom the false teachers deny is the Lord “who bought them”. In other words, these false teachers had been redeemed by Jesus; that is, they had, at some time, truly repented and been given God’s life. They really are members of the body of Christ, but they are also members of the Institution who worship God rightly . . . some of the time.

The Spirit within God’s children who have joined the Institution is grieved for the confusion and division that they have joined themselves to. Those children sense their heavenly Father’s call to come out of the confusion, but they seldom understand it. *Surely*, they think, *God cannot mean for us to come out of the church!* But why not? The Greek word for “church” is found nowhere in the New Testament scriptures.¹³⁵ It was added by churchmen so as to make it appear that church religion is of God. The church is an evil Institution. It has never been of God, and God wants His people to come out of it. For a long time now, God’s children have been in need of a *who* from Christ, an anointed man of God, to show them the way out of the *what* of Satan, the Institution of the church – Christianity.

HYPOCRISY

Satan deserves the title, “the father of lies” (Jn. 8:44) because he was the first to tell a lie. But Satan *was* a lie before he ever told one, for he continued to appear to be a humble servant of God after his heart had become proud. However, since the knowledge of what was truly good and evil was hidden in the Son at that time, Satan did not understand that he had become a lie; still, he had become it. Those who become a lie neither appear to be what they are nor understand how God sees them. We have shown that Satan fully believed that he was in good standing with God after he became proud, and it was his enormous self-confidence which influenced others to believe the lie he had become.

When someone *becomes* a lie, even true words that he may speak are lies because his use of those true words leaves the impression that he himself is truthful. This is what I meant before when I said that if a man, himself, is not the truth, he is a liar no matter what he says. Such a man is lying even when he quotes the Bible because truthfulness is a matter of the heart, not of the words that proceed from the mouth. Satan accurately quoted scriptures to Jesus in the wilderness. Was he not lying when he did so? And in the garden of Eden, the Serpent told Eve

¹³⁵ The Greek noun for “church”, *kuriakon*, appears nowhere in the New Testament books. Nevertheless, men of the Institution mistranslated the Greek word *ekklesia* as “church” in order to legitimize the Institution. William Tyndall (c. 1494–1536) refused to translate *ekklesia* as “church” in his English translation, and for his efforts to produce a faithful translation, churchmen hunted him down and murdered him. To secure the support of powerful churchmen, King James ordered his translators to mistranslate *ekklesia* as “church”, forbidding a right translation such as “assembly” or “congregation”.

the truth, factually speaking,¹³⁶ but the Serpent himself was a lie. Therefore, everything he said to Eve was a lie, and Eve's life was ruined because she believed him.

Originally, the Greek word *hypocrite* was the word for a stage actor. In acting, the character the audience sees is not the person who is there. The words the actor speaks are not his, for they are not from his heart. They are words that the author of the play wants him to say. Likewise, the actor's deeds on stage are not done from his heart. They are deeds he is told to perform. The real person on the stage is hidden, though his body is seen, because his real thoughts and feelings are not expressed.

Satan became an actor, a hypocrite, when what he appeared to be was no longer what he really was, when his appearance of humility became a mask for the pride in his heart. This putting on an act, this seeming to be one thing but really being another, is the way of life Satan fell into the moment he left the first wrong impression about himself among the angels in heaven. When his true purpose was no longer humble service to God but self-aggrandizement, he became a liar and a hypocrite. His continued obedience and capable service to God appeared to be sincere, and millions of angels admired him because of it; however, the real Satan was the one not seen, the one who loved himself and who coveted God's glory. That hypocrisy, that putting on an act, is what Jesus cast out of heaven, and since Satan's expulsion, every creature in heaven has been completely whatever he appears to be. Whatever any heavenly being says or does now is said or done sincerely. There is no more play-acting where Jesus reigns; everything is true and sincere.

All acting is form, and all forms are an imitation of something real. Form is the imitation of life. Membership in the Institution is an imitation of membership in the body of Christ, the Institution's communion ceremonies are imitations of the saints' spiritual communion with God, and the Institution's baptisms in water are imitations of the spiritual baptism of Christ. But imitations of life have no life, and they can impart no grace. They are practiced by those without the life of God and, unfortunately, by those also in God's family who do not possess the knowledge of God.

DEMONIC WISDOM

Paul said that the wisdom he spoke was different from the wisdom that rulers of this age possessed (1Cor. 2:6). He did not deny that those rulers had wisdom; he only maintained that their wisdom was the kind that Christ gives the saints. For a sinful person to know how to act as if he is righteous is the kind of wisdom demons possess,¹³⁷ and James admonished the saints not to use it:

¹³⁶ It was true, as the Serpent told Eve (Gen. 3:5), that if she ate the forbidden fruit, her eyes would be opened (Gen. 3:7a) and that she would become like God, knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:22). Even the Serpent's lie that she would not die if she disobeyed God (Gen. 3:4) was in a way true, for neither she nor Adam dropped dead immediately when they ate the fruit. We are not told how long Eve lived after she ate the forbidden fruit, but Adam died at the age of 930.

¹³⁷ To be able to put on a convincing act is a kind of wisdom. The actress whom Joab hired to fool King David is called "a wise woman" (2Sam. 14:2-3).

James 3

14. If you have bitter envy and strife in your heart, do not glory and lie against the truth.
15. This wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.

James was describing believers who rejoice in the Assembly of saints while having a guilty conscience as possessing “demonic wisdom”. While the Accuser and his angels were in heaven, they gathered along with other sons of God (Job 1:6; 2:1), and they worshipped with rejoicing and song along with God’s pure-hearted creatures (Job 38:7). Nothing in the Bible suggests that Satan and his angels lost that kind of wisdom when they lost their place in heaven. In fact, we know that they continue to worship God because those whom Jesus called Satan’s sons, that is, the men who follow Satan’s lead, are dedicated to the worship and praise of God. And, like Satan and his angels, these sons of Satan do their worshipping in the midst of children of God who are pure in heart. The apostles, too, saw this happening among the saints in their day.

Peter observed this wicked wisdom at work in certain ministers who rejoiced in the midst of innocent children of God, promising those innocent children eternal blessings, while they themselves continued in secret sins:

2Peter 2

12. These men, like unreasoning beasts in nature that are born to be caught and killed, speak evil of things they do not understand and shall be destroyed in their destruction,
13. receiving the reward of unrighteousness. *They are spots and blemishes, considering daily luxury a delight, reveling in their deceits while they feast with you,*
14. having eyes that are full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, seducing unstable souls, having a heart trained in covetousness. *They are cursed children.*
15. They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following after the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the reward of unrighteousness.
16. But he was rebuked for his lawless conduct; a dumb ass, speaking with human voice, restrained the madness of the prophet.
17. These men are wells without water, clouds driven by a storm, for whom the blackness of darkness is forever reserved.
18. Making pretentious, vain speeches, they seduce, through lusts of the flesh *and* self-indulgent ways, those who have just¹³⁸ escaped from those who live in error,
- 19a. promising them liberty while they, themselves, are slaves to depravity.

The Institution trains men in this demonic wisdom. Insisting on ceremonial forms and promising people eternal benefits for participating in them, the Institution compels people to

¹³⁸ This is from the UBS Greek text. The Byzantine text has “truly”, but that word is difficult to justify in this context.

embrace its appearance of righteousness rather than seek the righteousness of God. Christianity claims to be the way, and the only way to God. It is, in fact, the darkest of all religions, for unlike any of man's other religions, it proclaims its dead forms in the name of the Prince of life. Jesus told me long ago, "The closer a thing comes to being true without being true, the more evil it is because the more people it can deceive." Using the precious name of Jesus does not sanctify Christianity's forms; on the contrary, its dead forms pollute his holy name as no other religion on earth can.

Demonic wisdom might be said to make men half good, but the half that it makes good is what is seen instead of what is within. But to be half good, as we have shown before, is worse than being no good at all. Being half good shows that a person has loved God enough to repent and receive His life, but has not loved Him enough to continue in His word and be made free (Jn. 8:31–32). It is better never to have received the life of God and escaped the bondage of sin than to receive it and then return to the spiritual vomit of dead form. When Peter wrote the following, he was speaking of children of God who had done that:

2Peter 2

20. If after escaping the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they become involved in them again, and are overcome, their last state is worse than the first.
21. It would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after knowing *it*, to turn from the holy commandment *that was* delivered to them.
22. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to his own vomit, and a washed sow to wallowing in the mud."

THE GREATEST HYPOCRITE OF ALL

Hypocrisy, or the hiding of what is within, is the norm in this world, and before the Son was revealed, hypocrisy was the norm in heaven, too. Even God hid His innermost feelings and thoughts because He was determined that His beloved Son would have the honor of revealing them. As long as God kept His Son hidden, nothing anywhere, including Himself, was as it appeared to be. God, as it turns out, was the greatest actor of all. Everything that men or angels saw and heard from God before the Son was revealed was only part of an incomparably cunning performance by which God kept all the treasures of His wisdom and knowledge hidden until the appointed time. For millennia, God patiently and politely received Satan into His presence, sending him on missions that were clearly important. Some creatures in heaven, judging by appearances, came to the conclusion that Satan was good, but they were fooled more by God's hypocrisy than by Satan's. God's holy and wise act, His magnificent performance, concealed the truth about everybody and everything until the Son was revealed.

God's holy hypocrisy sprang from a humble heart full of love for the Son, and for us. Satan's hypocrisy sprang from a heart full of pride and love for himself. Because God was a hypocrite, we have eternal life. Because Satan was a hypocrite, millions are forever damned. Paul wrote, "To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure" (Tit. 1:15). Because God is pure, everything He does is pure, regardless of how bad it looks to humans. And because Satan is evil, everything he does is evil, regardless of how good it looks to humans.

Humans are not the standard; God is. As James Hammonds, a dear brother in Christ, once testified in our Assembly, “God can be right any kinda way He wants to.” That is sound doctrine.

God is neither foolish nor weak. Nevertheless, Paul felt free to say that “the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1Cor. 1:25). In the same vein, we may say that the hypocrisy of God is more trustworthy than the sincerity of men, and any act that God puts on is more truthful than the honesty of man.

One of the most difficult lessons to learn about life is that *nothing* is unclean of itself (Rom. 14:14). *Whether any deed is good or evil is a matter of the heart; it has nothing to do with the visible form!* Jesus said so (Mt. 15:18–20). Being a hypocrite does not make one either good or evil; the question is, what kind of hypocrite is he? A hypocrite like God or a hypocrite like Satan? Being a hypocrite is holy if the hypocrite himself is holy; that is, if he is led by God’s holy Spirit to put on an act (e.g., 1Kgs. 20:38–43). The prophet Hosea’s adultery with a married woman was holy because Hosea was holy; God told him to do it (Hos. 3). What men call lying can be holy and good, too. God once sent Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint David to be Israel’s next king, but Samuel knew that King Saul would kill him if he found out that he had anointed someone to take Saul’s place. When Samuel pleaded with God to consider the danger He was putting him in, God told the reluctant prophet to lie (as humans would see it) about his reason for going to Bethlehem:

1Samuel 16

2. Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears *of it*, he will kill me!” And the LORD said, “Take a heifer from your herd, and say, ‘I have come to make sacrifice to the LORD.’”

It can hardly be stressed too much: A lie is a matter of the heart, not a matter of the syllables that proceed from the mouth. God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2). Everything that proceeds from His lips is true. If a thing is not true before God says it, then it becomes true *when* He says it! The very breath of His mouth creates what it says (Ps. 33:6). Regardless of what He says, “The words of the LORD *are* pure words” (Ps. 12:6). “His mouth is most sweet” (Song 5:16), “for the word of the LORD is right” (Ps. 33:4). When God told Samuel to say that he was coming to Bethlehem to make a sacrifice, that commandment from His lips created a new reason for Samuel to go there. Samuel could not lie any more than God could when he repeated what God had told him to say, at the time God told him to say it.

The Spirit of God does not lead men to sin because the Spirit is without sin. Everything in the life of God is pure and good. Every work of God has purpose, whether it be destroying the world with a flood or opening the eyes of the blind. “The judgments of the LORD are true; they are altogether righteous” (Ps. 19:9b). “The works of His hands are truth and judgment” (Ps. 111:7). When we see this about God, and believe it, our hearts can only cry out with the psalmist, “Oh, that men would praise the LORD for His lovingkindness, and for His wondrous works for the children of men!” (Ps. 107:8).

On the other hand, nothing that man does in his own wisdom and power is either holy or good. “Surely, men of low status are vanity, and men of high status are a lie. Laid in a balance together, they *are lighter* than vanity” (Ps. 62:9). When men boast of anything they have done,

they are like a turtle on a busy highway boasting of its mighty shell. Romans were boasting of Rome as “the eternal city” even before Christians began to do so,¹³⁹ but nothing on earth is eternal. God alone has a place of eternal rest, and His children will not be disappointed, for God “has prepared for them a city” (Heb. 11:16).

Even the heavens are unclean in God’s sight (Job 15:15), and compared to Him, heavenly creatures are foolish and blind (Job 4:18). God humbles Himself to so much as look at things in heaven, much less at this wasteland of wickedness called earth (Ps. 113:6). God is the greatest of whatever exists, and whatever He is, is holy and true and good. He is completely unjudgeable because His thoughts and His ways are far above the thoughts and ways of all His creatures, not just man’s. Righteousness is always and only a matter of the heart, and God’s heart is perfectly pure all the time. In Him is not even a hint of unrighteousness, and if we think we see any, it is only because we are judging Him by our own faulty standard.

FEAR

Life, by definition, is sincere. It is not form; it is real. Life and form are forever opposed to one another, just as the Spirit and the flesh are forever opposed to one another (Gal. 5:17). Life is “in the Spirit” because the Spirit itself is life (Rom. 8:10), and all form is “in the flesh” because the flesh itself is a form. When Paul said that Christ died for us “when we were without strength” (Rom. 5:6), the strength to which he was referring included the strength to live sincerely and, so, to escape the flesh’s bondage to form. We did not have that kind of strength. The pressure of this world to put on an act is too great for any of us to withstand, and God gave His Son so that we might truly live, who all our lives were in bondage to fear and were hiding behind forms (Heb. 2:15).

When John the Baptist was born, his father Zacharias prayed a stirring prayer in which he expressed the desire of God’s people everywhere. He said that in sending the Messiah, God would make it possible “that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve *Him* without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life” (Lk. 1:74–75). We learn in Revelation 21:8 that the fearful will be damned along with murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and other ungodly people. But God sent His Son to set us free from fear.

People hide behind forms because they fear living more than they fear dying, but to put on a mask must be learned. In the garden of Eden, Adam had not learned to act when he ate the forbidden fruit, and fear replaced the happiness and joy that he had previously felt in God’s presence. Therefore, the next time God came to visit him and Eve,

Genesis 3

8. they heard the voice of the LORD God as He walked about in the garden in the evening breeze, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the face of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.
9. And the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, “Where are you?”
- 10a. And he said, “I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself.”

¹³⁹ The Latin poet Tibullus (c. 54–19 BC) may have been the first to use this phrase (Book II.5.23).

Adam and Eve hid from God because their feelings had changed. Before they sinned, they were happy whenever He came to spend time with them, but after they sinned, they were afraid, and their actions showed it. There were no hypocrites in the world to teach Adam the demonic wisdom that James spoke of; therefore, Adam openly confessed that he was afraid and was hiding. Adam had sinned, but he was still so sincere that he could not act as if all was well. In his guilty bosom, there remained enough childlike simplicity to keep him from putting on a nice suit and then walking out to greet God with a smile as if all was well with his soul.

In a previous chapter, I pointed out that it is the presence of God rather than His absence that most frightens men. That is the condition of the entire human race, for we inherited from Adam and Eve not only a sinful nature but also the fear that goes with it. David was declaring liberty from that fear when he wrote, "I will not fear what man can do to me!" (Ps. 56:11), but that was not David speaking; it was the sinless Son, describing the kind of life he would live in this dangerous world of sinners. The Son did not want to suffer, but he made the choice not to allow the fear of suffering to make him act so as to please men instead of his heavenly Father.

It is human nature to give in to the pressure of the world to act, but it is God's nature to be real, and with God's life, we can be like Him and overcome the world's pressure to act, just as Jesus did. Without the strength of God's life, though, our words, like a stage actor's, are mostly determined by what others want to hear us say, and our deeds are mostly determined by what others want to see us do. Without the strength of God's life, our true selves stay hidden behind the expected forms.

SINCERITY

The most undervalued fruit of the Spirit is sincerity, a fruit that Paul, surprisingly, did not mention in his well-known list of spiritual fruit:

Galatians 5

22. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, faith,
23. meekness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Without sincerity, these other fruits of the Spirit cannot be used rightly. Patience is a fruit of the Spirit, but insincere patience has a devious motive. Wicked Absalom was patient. He waited two years before springing his trap and murdering his half-brother, Amnon (2Sam. 13:23–29). Faith is a fruit of the Spirit, but insincere faith can be used to seduce souls, as the existence of false apostles proves. And Solomon warned his son to beware of insincere kindness, telling him, "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel" (Prov. 12:10). Sincerity's omission from Paul's list of spiritual fruit does not mean that Paul failed to recognize its importance. In other places, he emphasized it greatly:

1Corinthians 5

- 7b. Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us,
8. so that we might keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

2Corinthians 1

12. Our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that with simplicity and godly sincerity (not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God), we have conducted ourselves in the world, and all the more toward you.

Sincerity is as much the opposite of hypocrisy as is life. *A sincere person is truly living because he is living truly.* But a person living a life of hypocrisy, a life of appearance and form, is not living at all. We are truly living when we are living honestly with our neighbors, when what our neighbors hear from us comes from our heart, and when what they see in us shows how we truly feel. Paul gave this exhortation to the family of God: “Putting away lying, speak the truth, each one, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another” (Eph. 4:25). Jesus described people who were living in form as “dead” (Mt. 8:22) because *living by appearances is spiritual death.*

CHILDREN

As newborns, we were all sincere. We cried unashamedly when we were hurting or disappointed, and we welcomed love when it was offered. If a little child is frightened, he cries and runs to his mother. He is too busy living from the heart, too sincere, to pause to consider what others may be thinking about his tears. But the world took that away from us. It trained us to be cunning; that is, to act by burying our feelings and thoughts. And it does not take long for children to figure out how to act so as to please others and get what they want.

Form is the default condition of human society, and the world trains us all to hide our thoughts behind acceptable forms. Children being teased by other children on the playground is one of the thousands of ways that children are trained to conform and to act. Little children learn to survive by wearing masks and to hide their hurts, fears, and disappointments. As time passes, real feelings are driven deeper into children’s hearts, and, in time, to act becomes the norm. There are no exceptions. This is the way of the whole world, in every culture. Every person born into this world is trained from birth in the art of hypocrisy. With even the best of intentions, we pressure one another to put on an act and to hide feelings behind forms. At home, at play, at worship, and everywhere in public, everyone in this cruel world is taught that hypocrisy, or living by form, is less painful than sincerity, and we all have passed hypocrisy on to others. In fact, those considered good people do the most effective job of teaching hypocrisy to others because they know the most acceptable and beneficial forms to keep.

Every newborn is by nature self-centered and demanding. Nothing – absolutely nothing – matters to an infant but its own fleshly comfort. Teaching a child to act out proper form is the world’s response to that self-centeredness of children. Parents are teaching their children hypocrisy when they teach them to act right; that is, to be courteous and dutiful. But proper form does not create righteousness in a child’s heart or change its nature. Proper form is only an imitation of righteousness that “good” children learn to act out. The best school teachers teach hypocrisy along with their other lessons whenever they enforce order in their classroom. The forms of self-restraint and submission to authority that they impose are contrary to children’s nature. They are merely forms which children are taught, and smart children learn to use those forms to avoid shame or punishment, or to gain favor with the adults who can give them what they want. Courteous and obedient people, both children and adults, are only self-willed and

self-centered souls who have learned not to act the way they really are. Their nature has not been changed by the forms they employ; it is still beastly.

The “bad” people are those whose fallen nature is not so restrained by form. They are not the accomplished hypocrites the “good” people are, for they do not know as well how to put on an act and hide their true nature behind acceptable forms. It is for that reason that they are frowned upon and ostracized by the “good” people. In extreme cases, authorities even pursue and punish them. But because harlots and other social outcasts were more real than the “good” people in high places who despised them, Jesus got along with them better than with the “good” people in Israel. Harlots and other outcasts were sinners, but they were not trying to hide it. The “good” people were also sinners, but they would not admit it. The “good” people despised the “bad” people for the same reason that they despised Jesus; namely, neither Jesus nor the “bad” people were hiding behind acceptable forms.¹⁴⁰ Jesus was truly good and was open about it, and the “bad” people were truly bad and were open about it.

The “good” people in this world still despise the “bad” people (as well as the saints who are like Jesus), and the authorities of earth still pursue and punish them (as well as those who are truly like Jesus). But “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23) because no one is born into this world with God’s kind of life. We are all bad in God’s sight. When Shakespeare wrote, “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players,” he was telling the truth. Every person on earth, whether intentional or not, whether considered good or bad, is putting on an act, except for those sincere souls who have received God’s kind of life and are walking in it.

In revealing His Son, God ended His act and fully opened His heart to us. It is ungodly for us to hide any longer behind forms because God is no longer hiding from us. He is altogether who He revealed Himself to be in His Son. The abundant life that Jesus suffered for us to have is life that gives us power to live from the heart again, like a child, and yet, have it be good this time, not self-willed and self-centered. Jesus insisted that unless this happens, unless we stop acting and become as sincere little children again, we will never see the kingdom of God:

Matthew 18

2. When Jesus had called a little child to him, he stood *the child* in their midst
3. and said, “Truly, I tell you, unless you are converted and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.
4. Whoever humbles himself like this little child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

God’s life gives us the courage to resist the intimidation of the world and be ourselves, as we once were when we were little children. The love of God, which is “poured out in our hearts by the holy Spirit”, encourages us to live again in childlike sincerity. The Spirit of God re-creates us as children of a Father who will not fail us, as siblings of a big brother who will always be with us and watch over us, and as members of a family whose influence is the opposite of that of the

¹⁴⁰ Sometimes, “bad” people live by forms that are different from the forms that “good” people live by. For example, street gangs and terrorist organizations have their own laws and their own strictly enforced codes of conduct.

world. For when we as the family of God walk together in our Father's love, we encourage one another to live without fear of ridicule or betrayal.

Jesus overcame the world by living sincerely, by steadfastly being the person God created him to be. In spite of all he suffered, he remained determined to feel the feelings and think the thoughts that were in the kind of life God gave him, and to do the work God created him to do. Jesus was childlike in that regard, and his meek, sincere attitude was an essential part of his overcoming the world. We will certainly suffer the ridicule of the world if we follow Jesus' example, but if we persist in childlike sincerity, we will live with the Father and the Son forever, sincerely enjoying perfect peace and joy.

Like many young men in this culture, I once prided myself for being "cool"; that is, I was proud of how well I could suppress my true feelings and of how convincingly I could act unconcerned about the feelings of others. As a young man, sometimes I would not – no, I was trapped by pride and I *could not* – let my own mother kiss me, for I lived in fear of sincerity, and her open, tender feelings were too real to fit into my act. They were embarrassing to me, even though they were showing me the way of genuine life in Christ. Shortly after she died, I, as a chastened and hurting young man, wrote this poem in memory of her:

I Prided Myself

I prided myself for the hardness
of my face.
Would not allow, for any cause,
its callous gaze tears to abase.

Looked coolly into watery eyes –
blindness to another's pain.
Cruelty's companion, and yet,
I longed to be whole again.

Whole, like the days of innocent play,
and, falling down,
bore no weight of anxious fear that minds
were contemplating my tearful frown.

And, oh, you knew. You knew.
You knew the goodness of hurting
for me, who hid in pales
and called my bondage liberty.

Wizened Healer came, scythe firm in hand,
mettle his to prove.
One swift stroke, the curing damage done,
callousness to remove.

Oh, could you see me now!
How you would rejoice to see

this brokenness, this need and want
of sympathy.

A gift most precious given.
Your desire at very long last fulfilled.
For me to feel! Cut, but open now
to be saddened, to be thrilled.

A purchased liberty.
The price, the deliverer's loss.
And I on this side stand to give
to you, who paid the cost.

O cursed reaping! Now to know the joy
of joy and sorrow both,
while you, beyond the reach of my cry,
deserve to hear it most.

Those who walk in God's life with Jesus do not wait until it is too late to show their love for others. They cannot wait because God's kind of life compels them to live from the heart, and it teaches them that waiting to love is to not love at all. *God is not waiting to pour out His love for us; He did that when He opened His heart on the day of Pentecost, pouring out eternal life from His bosom like rivers of living water into our souls.* Now, God is only waiting for us to become childlike enough to open our hearts and ask Him, for His Son's sake, to give us His free gift, as Jesus said:

Luke 11

9. Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.
10. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened.
11. When a son asks for bread, what father among you will give him a stone? Or *if he asks* for a fish, will he give him a snake instead of a fish?
12. Or again, if he asks for an egg, will he give him a scorpion?
13. If you then, being evil, know to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father who is in heaven give *His* holy Spirit to those who ask Him?



Appendix

The Spiritual Condition of the Disciples before Pentecost

Jesus and his disciples lived under the law of Moses, and they studiously kept the law's commandments. However, while Jesus was here with them, the disciples did not have the qualities of God's righteousness that the Spirit brings. The Spirit had not yet been given because the awful price for it had not yet been paid.

So, before the Spirit came upon them in Acts 2, the disciples were righteous by the law's standards, but they were not righteous by the standards of the New Covenant that Jesus' sacrifice inaugurated. The following scriptures show what the spiritual condition of the disciples was, before they were born again on the day of Pentecost:

- They were clean (Jn. 13:10–11; 15:3), but they were not sanctified (Jn. 17:17, 19).
- They believed in God (Jn. 2:11; 17:8), but they did not believe (Jn. 14:12, 29; 16:29–33; 11:11–15; Mk. 16:17–18).
- They loved Jesus (Jn. 16:27), but the love of God was not in them (Jn. 17:26; Rom. 5:5).
- They belonged to God (Jn. 17:6), but they did not have the Spirit within them (Jn. 14:15–17). (Notice the New Testament standard for belonging to God, found in Romans 8:9.)
- They believed that God sent Jesus (Jn. 17:8, 25), but they did not know Jesus (Jn. 14:7–9).
- They were not of the world (Jn. 15:18–20; 17:14), but they were not in Christ (Jn. 17:21–23, 26).
- They were chosen and ordained (Jn. 15:16), but they could not bear to hear all the truth (Jn. 16:12). Nor could they ask anything in Jesus' name (Jn. 16:23–26).
- They were like unborn babies (Jn. 16:20–22).

Proverbs 8: The Son as Wisdom

The Hebrew noun for “wisdom”, being a feminine noun, is referred to as “she” and “her”.

Proverbs 8

1. Does not wisdom call? And understanding give her voice?
2. At the top of high places, along the road, at the crossroads, she stands.
3. Beside the gates, at the entrance of the cities, at the doors, she cries out,
4. “Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the children of Adam.
5. Understand subtlety, you simpletons! And you fools, be of an understanding heart!
6. Listen! For I speak of excellent things, and from the opening of my lips *come* right things.
7. My mouth will speak truth, and wickedness is an abomination to my lips.
8. All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.
9. All of them are right¹⁴¹ to the one who understands, and upright to those who find knowledge.
10. Receive my reproof and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold,
11. for wisdom is better than rubies, and all that is desirable cannot compare with her.
12. I, wisdom, dwell with prudence; I uncover knowledge of cunning ways.
13. The fear of the LORD is to hate evil. I hate pride, haughtiness, an evil manner, and a perverse mouth.
14. Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom. I am understanding. I have strength.
15. By me, kings rule, and rulers make righteous decrees.
16. By me, princes and nobles reign, and all who judge rightly.
17. I love those who love me, and those who seek me will find me.
18. Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and righteousness.
19. My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold, and my revenue better than choice silver.
20. I walk in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of justice,
21. to cause those who love me to inherit substance; I will fill their storehouses.

¹⁴¹ This Hebrew word literally means “straight”, as opposed to “crooked” (v. 8).

Jewish Teaching about Satan before Jesus

Of the two major sources of Jewish thought at or near the time of Jesus, the earlier of them, if we accept the standard dating of 150 BC to AD 70, is the Dead Sea Scrolls.¹⁴² The Scrolls give us insight into what some radically devout Jews thought about Satan and evil spirits around the time Jesus lived. As the list below shows, the authors of the Scrolls were aware that evil spirits exist. They even called evil spirits by name, “Belial” being the name most frequently used. But that name was not new; it had been in use for more than a thousand years when the Scrolls were written (e.g., Dt. 13:13). However, like the Old Testament, *the Scrolls never associated Belial with Satan!* Indeed, of the many wicked spirits named in the Scrolls, not one of them is linked to Satan. Some modern commentators make that connection, speaking of Satan when referring to the Belial of the Scrolls as if Satan’s name is there.¹⁴³ But it is not. They mention Satan only because they have been influenced by truth revealed by the Son, not because the Scrolls do it.

Here is a list of the names and titles for evil spirits found in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the name of the scroll in which they are found. Note that Satan is not among them.

The Damascus Document

- Guardian Angels (who fell and mated with women on earth)
- Belial
- Yannes and “his brother”
- The angel of Obstruction

Tales of the Patriarchs

- The Watchers (another name for the Guardian Angels, above)

Charter of a Jewish Sectarian Association

- The Angel of Darkness

The Ages of the World

- Azazel and the angels

The Book of Enoch

- Shemihaza

A Paraphrase of Genesis and Exodus

- The Prince of Malevolence (Mastemah)

The Songs of the Sage for Protection against Evil Spirits

- The destroying angels, spirits of the bastards, demons, Lilith, howlers, and [desert dwellers . . .]

The Vision of Amram

- Malki-Resha, the ruler of wickedness

¹⁴² Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Edward Cook, editors, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005).

¹⁴³ E.g., *Ibid.*, p. 55.

An Exorcism

- The male Wasting-demon and the female Wasting-demon
- Fever-demon and Chills-demon and Chest Pain-demon
- The male Shrine-spirit and the female-Shrine spirit
- Demons who breach [walls . . .]

The writings of Josephus provide us with a second potential source for determining the thought of Jews concerning Satan and evil spirits at about the time of Jesus. Except what is found in Josephus' two books, hardly anything is known about Israel's history in the years following the apostles. However, Josephus' facts, not to mention his character, are questionable, and information from him is never to be accepted without corroboration. Still, what he says, or does not say, about Satan and evil spirits probably reflects the views of the more cosmopolitan Jews of the time.

Like many others of his day, Jew and Gentile alike, Josephus believed in the existence of harmful spirits (*Jewish Antiquities*, V.166), but as with both the Old Testament and the Dead Sea Scrolls, he never made a connection between those hurtful spirits and Satan. It is by noticing what Josephus omitted that we gain the greatest insight into what he thought about Satan. For example, he went into some detail in relating the story of the Serpent's seduction of Eve, but he obviously thought of that Serpent as nothing more than an animal (*Antiquities*, I.40–51). Satan's prosecution of Joshua the high priest in God's heavenly court and the sufferings of Job, Josephus did not mention at all.

The English word "demon" is derived from the Greek word Josephus used for "spirit": *daimon*. It is sometimes translated, "evil spirit", but that is only because of the influence of the Son; it is not necessarily how Josephus thought. To him, *daimon* meant only a spirit. He even spoke of the *daimon* of a dead man (*Jewish Wars*, I.607) the way people today speak of ghosts. He knew, of course, that spirits can be helpful or harmful. He reported that Herod the Great lamented that some desolating *daimon* was working against him (*Jewish Wars* I.628). On the other hand, it was well known that the city of Alexandria erected a prominent shrine dedicated to "the good *daimon*", a minor snake god associated with the founding of the city, and in ancient Athens, the second day of each month was set aside to honor the local good *daimon*. Josephus acknowledged that *daimons* can cause physical and psychological harm, as to King Saul (*Antiquities*, VI.166⁽²⁾), but that is no more than what anyone in the ancient world would have thought. It does not mean that Josephus understood demons to be what Jesus revealed them to be.

Josephus used every term for spiritual beings, including those for *God* and *Deity*, as we would expect of a Jew who had a close relationship with Gentiles. Josephus was thoroughly a product of his time and place, speaking at times of the biblical "angel of God" (*Wars*, V.388), while at other times acknowledging the Roman goddesses, Fortune (*Wars*, IV.40) and Fate (*Wars*, VI.267). That blend could only have been willingly made. Miss Fortune did not make Josephus do it. An ignorance of the Son did.



Scripture Index

Genesis	20:16.....202	6:24-25.....82
1:26.....5, 25	21:5-6.....256	6:26.....83
1:29.....25	21:6.....50	9:15-23.....136
2:16-17.....145	21:14.....42, 206	16:28-33.....215
3:4.....431	21:15-17.....256	20:7-8.....396
3:5.....50, 431	22:8-9.....50	22:22.....211
3:6.....244	22:28.....50	22:27.....266
3:6-7.....145	23:2.....428	22:31.....261, 265
3:7.....431	23:20-21.....212, 213	22:32.....211
3:8.....438	24.....40 ²	22:33.....211
3:9-10.....439	24:6-8.....40	23:9.....45
3:15.....136	28:12.....202	24:17.....138
3:17-19.....28, 49	30:11-16.....200	25:2-3.....379
3:22.....5, 50,	30:18-21.....198	25:6-9.....379
.....145, 431	30:33.....409	31:16.....379
4:9.....416	33:11.....67	
6:1-4.....231		Deuteronomy
7:21-22.....215	Leviticus	4:2.....409
11:7.....5	1:3.....236	5:2.....304
15:12-18.....304	1:4-5.....237	5:23.....304
18:1-2.....261	1:9.....198	6:5.....399
19:1-25.....214	1:13.....198	6:25.....142
21:1-2.....233	4:3.....309	9:4-5.....214
23:7.....261	7:26-27.....273, 285	10:16.....147
24:1-10.....136	8:1-6.....198	12:15.....245
25:1.....233	9:24.....316	12:32.....409
28:12.....5	10:1-2.....310, 409	13:13.....453
32:3.....5	11:42-44.....290	17:8-12.....48
32:24-29.....250	11:43-44.....292	17:14-17.....400
32:28.....103	11:44-45.....147	18:13.....147
33:1-7.....261	16:14-15.....136	18:15.....198
41:40.....136	16:17.....318	18:18-19.....137
	17:10.....285	23:24.....208
Exodus	17:10-12.....273	23:24-25.....281
3:14.....396	17:11.....40	29:29.....77
4:16.....50	19:5.....236	32:17.....323
7:1.....50 ²	19:18.....399	32:46-47.....348
9:16.....241, 256	19:29.....292	
12:46.....136	20:2-5.....236	Joshua
15:3.....365	20:10.....42,	5:14.....261, 265
16:29.....282	.....206, 289	10:40.....214
17:5-6.....396	22:29.....236	13:22.....379
17:14-16.....262	24:5-9.....205	
20:8-11.....281		Judges
20:13.....167	Numbers	13:2-5.....233
20:14.....292	4:5-15.....19	13:17-18.....89
		13:20.....265

Ruth	18:28.....	261	20:7.....	67
2:10.....	19:21-22.....	261	26:16-20.....	310
1Samuel	20:1-2.....	206	30:6-10.....	204
1:1-2.....	20:9-10.....	167	30:11.....	204
2:7.....	24.....	200	30:18-19.....	204
8:5.....	24:1.....	200	30:20-21.....	204
8:6-7.....	24:10.....	200	33:9.....	155
8:10-18.....	24:15.....	214	Esther	
8:19-20.....	24:20.....	261	3:1-5.....	262
8:20.....	24:21-24.....	235	3:5-6.....	263
8:22.....	1Kings		6:6.....	267
11:7.....	1:16.....	261	6:6-9.....	314
13:14.....	1:23.....	261	Job	
15:2-3.....	1:31.....	261	1:1.....	185
15:8.....	1:53.....	261	1:6.....	177
15:32-33.....	2:19.....	261	1:6-12.....	177
16:2.....	18:21.....	422	1:8-9.....	179
16:7.....	20:30-43.....	167	1:10-12.....	180
18:6-9.....	20:35-36.....	363	2:2-4.....	181
18:10-11.....	20:38-43.....	436	2:3.....	223
19:9-10.....	22:17-23.....	267	2:5-7.....	182
20:41.....	22:19-22.....	217	2:9.....	184
21:1-6.....	22:20.....	179	4:18.....	437
24:8.....	2Kings		5:1.....	194
28:13.....	2:2.....	7	5:27.....	194
30:11-13.....	2:23-24.....	214	12:5.....	209
97:7.....	4:14-17.....	233	15:15.....	57, 437
138:1.....	5:1-19.....	205	16:2.....	203
2Samuel	16:10-15.....	406	19:21.....	181
3:27-28.....	17:6.....	172	23:4.....	186
9:6-8.....	17:13-15.....	172	23:8-10.....	82, 184
11:1-12.....	18:18.....	125	23:10.....	196
12:13.....	19:28.....	197	23:11-12.....	182
12:13-15.....	19:35.....	27, 214	27:5-6.....	182
12:14.....	1Chronicles		28:28.....	350
12:18.....	11:10.....	205	30:1.....	191
13:22-29.....	11:11.....	205	30:8-11.....	191
13:23-29.....	11:41.....	205	34:29.....	82
14:2-3.....	21.....	200	34:36.....	196
14:21-22.....	21:1.....	199, 200	38:1-2.....	185
14:33.....	2Chronicles		40:4.....	185
15:1-12.....	1:6.....	19	41:1-5.....	197
16:5-10.....			42:1-6.....	186
16:5-13.....			42:6.....	196

42:7.....	185	33:4.....	437	72:11.....	249
42:7-10.....	185	33:6.....	436	78:2.....	79
		34:7.....	88	78:49.....	214
Psalms		34:8.....	409	82:1.....	50
2:1.....	123	35:4-6.....	213	82:6.....	50, 51
2:2-12.....	124	36:1.....	350	83:3.....	90
2:4.....	123	36:5.....	365	84:3.....	316
2:8-9.....	249	36:6.....	144	89:15.....	427
2:10.....	134	39:5-6.....	193	91:1.....	90
2:11.....	93	40:6.....	15	91:11-12.....	274
5:2.....	144	40:7.....	327	91:12.....	245
5:5.....	221	40:7-9.....	12	94:12.....	220
7:11.....	221	40:8.....	13	94:12-13.....	171, 192
8:5.....	25, 240 ² , 266	41:4.....	20	98:4.....	417
8:6.....	10	41:9.....	20	102:18.....	39
12:6.....	437	45:6-7.....	5	102:25.....	5
14:1.....	79	45:7.....	101, 102	103:13.....	67
14:2.....	155	46:10.....	417	105:15.....	363
14:3.....	156	47:2.....	144	106:37.....	323
16:9-10.....	123	49:12.....	91	107:8.....	437
18:2.....	91	49:20.....	91	109.....	116,
18:6.....	120	50:16.....	352	.....	213, 216
18:6-9.....	304	50:21.....	215	109:6.....	210, 265 ²
18:7.....	121	51:2-3.....	198	110:1.....	15, 123, 312
18:9.....	120	51:5.....	49	111:3.....	144
19:1.....	79	51:7.....	198	111:7.....	437
19:3-4.....	79	51:10.....	198	113:4-6.....	189
19:9.....	350, 437	55:12-14.....	219	113:5.....	233
21:1-3.....	337	56:11.....	439	113:6.....	57, 437
21:4-7.....	338	58:3.....	388	113:9.....	233
22:1.....	121	59:16.....	91	115:4-8.....	408
22:6.....	121	62:9.....	437	118:22.....	137
22:7-8.....	121	68:5.....	67	119:114.....	91
22:7-11.....	122	68:18.....	123,	119:130.....	47
22:14.....	121	.....	137, 310	119:137.....	144
22:14-19.....	122	69.....	20	133.....	48
22:15.....	121	69:3.....	116	135:6.....	80,
22:16.....	121	69:4.....	116	.....	108, 343
22:17.....	121, 306	69:5.....	20	135:15-18.....	408
22:18.....	121	69:8.....	116	139:22.....	221
22:22.....	11	69:9.....	13, 71, 369		
22:30-31.....	39, 128	69:10.....	116	Proverbs	
25:14.....	77	69:11-12.....	116	1:5.....	361
27:10.....	67	69:19-22.....	166	1:7.....	350
31:20.....	91	69:21.....	116	3:11-12.....	220, 221
33:3.....	417	71:3.....	91	3:12.....	203

4:18.....	408	8:1-3.....	362	49:8-10.....	135
6:23.....	356	8:18.....	11, 128, 129	50:4.....	264
8:1-14.....	451	9:1-2.....	114	50:6.....	115
8:4.....	29	9:6.....	129, 343	50:11.....	277
8:13.....	350	9:16.....	165	52:14-15.....	115
8:15-21.....	452	11:1.....	136	53:2.....	114,
8:22-31.....	7, 99	11:2-3.....	320	.....	232, 415
8:30.....	14	13:9.....	167	53:2-3.....	88
8:36.....	355	13:13.....	105	53:3.....	118
9:1-2.....	412	13:17.....	104	53:4.....	117, 141,
9:10.....	350	13:19.....	104	.....	244, 269
11:19.....	401	14:12-14.....	174, 276	53:5-6.....	118
11:21.....	428	14:13-14.....	244, 260	53:6.....	388
12:1.....	358	14:14.....	205	53:7.....	118
12:10.....	440	14:15.....	277	53:7-9.....	118
12:28.....	17	22:15-25.....	127	53:8.....	118, 127
14:12.....	222, 401	22:20-22.....	125	53:9.....	118
14:30.....	362	22:23.....	125	53:10.....	128, 237
15:8.....	167	22:24-25.....	126	53:10-11.....	118, 305
16:25.....	222	28:9-10.....	225	53:10-12.....	119
20:5.....	361	28:11-12.....	107, 424	53:11.....	118
21:27.....	402	28:12.....	127	53:12.....	118
25:2.....	77	28:24-29.....	140	55:8.....	46
25:14.....	377	30:21.....	363	55:8-9.....	28
27:5.....	203	32:1-2.....	376	57:15.....	330
28:9.....	167	35:8.....	407	58:11.....	377
		40:3.....	137	62:11.....	38
Ecclesiastes		40:10.....	38	64:6.....	151, 165
1:2.....	190	41:23.....	96	65:17.....	260
1:9.....	334	42:1.....	20	66:1-3.....	165
2:14.....	96	42:4-6.....	117	66:8.....	39, 134
2:17.....	190	43:19.....	36, 334		
3:14.....	221, 398	43:20-22.....	39	Jeremiah	
7:1.....	190	45:15.....	78, 82	3:14-15.....	377
8:8.....	49	46:9-10.....	95	3:17.....	249
8:11.....	170	48:3-5.....	96	4:4.....	147
		48:6.....	96, 113	5:3.....	172
Song of Solomon		48:15-16.....	106	6:14.....	415
5:16.....	437	48:22.....	418	7:20.....	292
		49:1-3.....	20, 103	7:28.....	173
Isaiah		49:2.....	339	10:14.....	358
1:11-15.....	402	49:4.....	116	14:13.....	382
1:11-17.....	167	49:4-5.....	20	17:9.....	389
2:2.....	249	49:5-6.....	117	19:4-5.....	236
7:14.....	35, 112,	49:6.....	20	23:5.....	136
.....	136, 234	49:7.....	103	23:9.....	383

23:33–40.....	369	8:16–18.....	265	Zechariah	
30:14.....	167	8:25.....	379	1:10–11.....	178
32:33–35.....	236	9:21.....	5	3:1–4.....	201
33:3.....	78	9:22.....	110	3:4.....	202
36:26.....	90	9:23.....	67, 129	6:12.....	136
50:40.....	104	9:25.....	110	8:17.....	292
		9:26.....	118	9:9.....	137
Ezekiel		10:2–6.....	250	11:12–13.....	120
1:28–2.....	265	10:12–13.....	250	12:10.....	133
4:10–13.....	293	10:13.....	89	12:10–12.....	134
13:10–14.....	214	10:20.....	251	13:6.....	134
14:1–11.....	218	10:21.....	89, 251	13:7.....	101
14:14.....	188	12:1.....	252	14:2.....	252
14:20.....	188			14:3–4.....	133
22:30.....	376	Hosea			
27.....	244	1:2–3.....	292	Malachi	
28:12.....	262, 415	1:10.....	231	1:6.....	229
28:12–15.....	34	3:1–5.....	292	2:15.....	108
28:12–19.....	173	4:6.....	408	3:1.....	15, 106
28:13.....	243	5:15.....	369	4:2.....	138
28:15.....	265	6:3.....	319		
28:17.....	34	6:6.....	321	Matthew	
33:11.....	203	8:15.....	292	1:18.....	113
37:1–10.....	234			1:23.....	35
		Joel		2:2.....	112
Daniel		2:25.....	214	2:5–6.....	112
2:1–5.....	129	2:28.....	137	2:13–18.....	111
2:5.....	129			3:7.....	375
2:19.....	130	Amos		3:9.....	234
2:27.....	78	1:1.....	7	3:11.....	198, 375
2:28.....	77	4:11.....	104	3:16.....	15
2:29.....	78, 130	5:18.....	279, 415	3:16–17.....	228
2:34–35.....	130	5:21–24.....	167	4:1.....	240
2:44.....	131, 338	6:1.....	209	4:3–7.....	242
2:45.....	131	7:15.....	7	4:5–6.....	326
2:47.....	78	8:11–14.....	369	4:7.....	274
3:25.....	229			4:8–11.....	243
4:27–30.....	33	Micah		4:12–14.....	114
4:31–33.....	33	5:2.....	111	4:15–16.....	115
4:37.....	34			5:6.....	63, 81
7:1–2.....	131	Nahum		5:9.....	347
7:3.....	132	1:6.....	365	5:14.....	277, 360
7:13–14.....	132, 338			5:16.....	259
7:15–16.....	132	Zephaniah		5:17.....	68, 153, 398
7:28.....	133	3:9.....	93	5:20.....	151
8:16.....	5			5:21–22.....	141

5:27-28.....	141, 246	13:3-9.....	171	21:42.....	137
5:45.....	170	13:11.....	80, 91	22:1-4.....	390
5:48.....	142, 147	13:13.....	79	22:15.....	300
6:1.....	325	13:14.....	80	22:30.....	231
6:2.....	326	13:18-23.....	171	22:37-38.....	345
6:23.....	280	13:24-30.....	169	22:39-40.....	346
6:33.....	164	13:34-35.....	79	22:41-45.....	15, 123
7:1.....	321	13:40-43.....	170	23:1-	
7:13.....	407	13:46.....	48	3.....	256,
7:13-14.....	390	13:54-56.....	21		28, 413
7:14.....	407, 428	15:1-6.....	415	23:2-3.....	336
7:15.....	355, 383	15:1-9.....	283	23:5.....	414
7:21-22.....	364	15:7-9.....	422	23:6.....	414
7:22.....	223	15:9.....	390	23:7.....	414
7:23.....	364	15:10-19.....	291	23:14.....	221, 414
8:22.....	66, 441	15:14.....	279	23:15.....	221, 279
8:29.....	351	15:18-20.....	436		414
9:10-13.....	287	15:20.....	292	23:23.....	221, 403
9:13.....	321	15:22-26.....	39	23:27-28.....	35
10:1-4.....	218	16:8-11.....	58	23:29-31.....	414
10:29.....	350	16:15-20.....	66	23:29-33.....	380
10:40.....	357	16:16.....	64, 230	23:34.....	414
11:2-3.....	268	16:17.....	65	23:37.....	164
11:10.....	6	16:19.....	48	24:4-5.....	383
11:11.....	42, 48, 86	16:21.....	329	24:5.....	355
11:19.....	287	16:21-22.....	59	24:15.....	5
11:25-26.....	78	16:21-23.....	297	24:24.....	168
11:27.....	64, 67, 324	16:23.....	59, 64,	24:35.....	55, 105
11:29.....	194,		203, 270, 275	25:1-4.....	365
	281, 330	17:1-9.....	66	25:1-13.....	171
12:1-2.....	281	17:25-27.....	258	25:5-12.....	366
12:3-5.....	282	18:1.....	327	25:31-32.....	275
12:3-4.....	209	18:1-3.....	146, 194	25:41.....	175,
12:6.....	272	18:2-4.....	443		251, 270
12:7.....	209, 282, 321	18:10.....	88, 321	26:5.....	300
12:8.....	282	18:18-20.....	48	26:31.....	100
12:24-26.....	270	19:17.....	19, 44, 174	26:33-35.....	100
12:25-26.....	223, 251	19:26.....	63	26:35.....	296
12:27.....	374	20:20-21.....	327	26:39.....	328
12:30.....	421	20:28.....	329	26:50.....	302
12:34.....	218	21:2-5.....	137	26:52-53.....	305
12:40.....	12, 122	21:7-11.....	293	26:53.....	329
12:41.....	275	21:19.....	294	26:57.....	306
12:42.....	275	21:31.....	148	26:63.....	231
12:48-50.....	14	21:31-32.....	287	26:65-66.....	141
12:50.....	37	21:33-43.....	126	26:67-68.....	115
				26:70-72.....	206

26:73–75.....	297	7:18–23.....	246	2:8.....	233
27:4.....	119	8:17–18.....	79	2:8–11.....	64
27:5.....	328	8:21.....	58	2:9–11.....	234
27:7.....	119	9:33–34.....	327	2:11.....	65
27:18.....	276	10:6.....	19, 100	2:13–14.....	233
27:26–49.....	303	10:17–19.....	281	2:21.....	161
27:33–34.....	116	10:27.....	52, 63	2:34–35.....	71
27:35.....	122	11:11.....	294	2:40.....	238
27:39–43.....	303	11:13–14.....	294	2:40–52.....	247
27:41–42.....	245	11:15–17.....	294	2:49.....	232
27:41–43.....	122	11:18.....	300	3:16.....	375
27:45.....	121	11:22.....	335	3:21–22.....	228
27:46.....	121, 184, .....302	12:25.....	231	3:22.....	14
27:50–51.....	121	12:28–30.....	346	3:23.....	232, 240
27:54.....	230	12:31–34.....	347	4:1–2.....	240
27:55.....	303	12:37.....	119, 273, .....276	4:3–13.....	242
27:57–60.....	118	13:19.....	19	4:13.....	266
28:18.....	19, 44, .....136, 272, 337	13:32.....	46, 47, .....77, 183	4:14.....	54, 248
		14:18.....	219	4:16–30.....	269
Mark		14:31.....	296	4:28–29.....	299
1:3.....	137	14:32–33.....	237	4:28–30.....	90
1:8.....	375	14:34–36.....	238	4:34.....	65
1:9.....	161	14:50.....	270	4:34–35.....	63
1:10–11.....	228	14:61–64.....	61, 274	4:41.....	63
1:12.....	240	14:65.....	115	5:12–14.....	161
1:12–13.....	238	15:3–5.....	118	5:31.....	148
1:13.....	65	15:17–19.....	115	6:5.....	272
1:23–24.....	364	15:31–32.....	245	6:39.....	279
1:24.....	351	15:34.....	184, 302	7:19.....	5
1:25.....	352	15:39.....	304	7:24.....	5
2:5–7.....	272	15:40–41.....	303	7:28.....	86
2:15–16.....	287	16:17–18.....	316, 449	7:36–39.....	287
2:27.....	282			7:36–44.....	288
3:1–2.....	281	Luke		7:45–50.....	289
3:1–6.....	283	1:6.....	144	8:1–3.....	303
3:6.....	269, 300	1:19.....	5, 89	9:41.....	203
3:11.....	364	1:26.....	89	9:44–45.....	57
3:21.....	22, 163, .....269, 326	1:26–27.....	5, 113	9:50.....	421
3:31.....	269	1:26–36.....	8	9:52–56.....	203
3:31–35.....	326	1:29–31.....	113	9:56.....	295
4:15.....	270	1:31.....	112	9:60.....	66
4:37–39.....	20	1:37.....	63	10:18.....	270, 310, .....312
7:13.....	283	1:68–70.....	98	10:21.....	78
		1:74–75.....	438	10:22.....	28
				11:9–13.....	446

11:11.....	300	John	5:24.....	37	
11:19.....	374	1:1.....	3, 51, 52, 360	5:26.....	9, 29, 278
11:27-28.....	385	1:1-2.....	3	5:30.....	100
11:39.....	415	1:3.....	4, 265	5:39-40.....	110, 138
12:5.....	350	1:4.....	52, 112, 350	5:41.....	326, 330
12:32.....	338	1:4-9.....	278	5:44.....	330
13:26.....	223	1:9.....	72	5:45.....	201
14:1.....	281	1:11.....	231	5:46-47.....	72
14:7-10.....	194	1:12-13.....	128	6:14-15.....	249
14:7-11.....	174	1:13.....	55	6:15.....	59, 65
14:11.....	194	1:15.....	8	6:32-35.....	21
14:26.....	196	1:17.....	319	6:41.....	7, 21
15:10.....	150	1:18.....	8, 66	6:42.....	22
16:8.....	79, 406	1:29.....	8, 235	6:44.....	81, 93,
16:15.....	222	1:30.....	8	.....	190, 390
16:23-35.....	309	1:30-31.....	87	6:51.....	377
17:12-19.....	161	1:32.....	228	6:53.....	286
17:21.....	328	1:32-34.....	86	6:53-54.....	273
18:12.....	221	1:49.....	64	6:53-58.....	409
18:31-32.....	57	2:11.....	449	6:54.....	410
18:31-33.....	329	2:13-17.....	13	6:56.....	410
18:33-34.....	58	2:17.....	20	6:57.....	129, 285, 411
19:12-26.....	260	2:19-21.....	12	6:58.....	377
19:41.....	126	2:23-25.....	60, 274,	6:61-62.....	6
19:41-44.....	78	.....	390, 418, 427	6:63.....	286, 348, 411
20:9-15.....	370	2:24-25.....	65	6:66.....	59, 286, 411
20:19.....	371	3:7.....	35	6:66-67.....	273
20:20.....	281	3:7-8.....	425	6:68-70.....	64
22:3.....	301, 302	3:13.....	314	6:69-70.....	274
22:3-4.....	265	3:16.....	238, 339	6:71.....	218
22:24.....	194, 327	3:33.....	317, 426	7:1.....	161
22:26-27.....	194	3:35.....	337	7:3-4.....	327
22:31-32.....	295	3:36.....	333	7:5.....	269
22:33-34.....	296	4:1-2.....	375	7:10.....	161
22:47-48.....	301	4:10.....	36, 377	7:24.....	321
22:66-70.....	231	4:24.....	152	7:27.....	22, 231
23:34.....	62, 238	4:31-34.....	13	7:28.....	22
23:36-37.....	116	4:32.....	154, 410	7:28-30.....	22
23:47.....	230	4:34.....	154	7:37.....	161
24:6.....	308	5:17.....	284	7:37-39.....	278
24:15-16.....	87	5:18.....	285	7:39.....	8, 41
24:25.....	203	5:19.....	264, 331, 352	7:46.....	266
24:25-27.....	97, 108	5:19-21.....	44	7:49.....	156
24:32.....	108	5:20.....	243, 264	8:1-11.....	205,
24:45.....	108	5:22.....	311	.....	221, 413
		5:22-23.....	331	8:2-5.....	207

8:7-9.....	289	12:4-6.....	219, 327	15:18-20.....	71,
8:9.....	208	12:19.....	276		372, 449
8:10-11.....	290	12:23.....	300	15:20.....	45
8:12.....	29, 277, 360	12:31.....	251, 310	15:23.....	333
8:14.....	23	12:35-36.....	278	15:26-27.....	318
8:15.....	321	12:37.....	284	16:2.....	60, 300
8:17-19.....	23	12:39-40.....	284	16:2-3.....	207
8:21.....	357	12:42-43.....	325	16:7.....	143
8:23-24.....	357	12:43.....	222	16:8.....	369
8:28.....	264, 352	12:44.....	357	16:8-9.....	389
8:29.....	18, 20	12:49.....	264	16:11.....	251
8:31-32.....	167, 434	13:1.....	300	16:12.....	67, 163, 449
8:32.....	140, 226	13:2-5.....	194	16:13.....	8, 47, 58, 67,
8:36.....	397	13:10-11.....	449		143, 363, 408
8:42.....	371	13:18.....	20	16:20-22.....	128, 449
8:44.....	34, 156,	13:20.....	357	16:23-26.....	449
	214,	13:27.....	301	16:27.....	449
221,	270,	13:27-29.....	219	16:28.....	6
413, 431		13:35.....	348	16:29-32.....	65, 274
8:48.....	163	14:6.....	272, 324,	16:29-33.....	449
8:48-49.....	372		334, 351, 356	16:33.....	247
8:52.....	65	14:7-9.....	449	17:1.....	7, 300
8:53-58.....	275	14:9.....	86, 232	17:3.....	193
8:55.....	67	14:10.....	352	17:5.....	7
8:56-59.....	61	14:10-11.....	17	17:6.....	309, 449
8:58-59.....	299	14:12.....	316, 449	17:8.....	449
9:5.....	277, 350	14:15-17.....	449	17:11.....	10
9:35.....	275	14:17.....	17	17:14.....	449
9:39-41.....	62	14:20.....	19, 68	17:17.....	449
9:41.....	63, 148	14:21.....	58	17:18.....	355
10:10.....	28, 40, 395	14:23.....	17, 53,	17:19.....	449
10:17-18.....	120		58, 142, 423	17:20-23.....	18,
10:20.....	269	14:25-26.....	58, 143		93, 349
10:22-23.....	281	14:26.....	67, 317	17:21.....	17
10:27-28.....	313	14:28.....	9, 19, 43,	17:21-22.....	10
10:29.....	314		285, 352, 357	17:21-23.....	449
10:30.....	10, 272	14:29.....	449	17:22.....	10, 272
10:31-39.....	299	14:30.....	251, 301, 420	17:23.....	93, 349
10:34-36.....	51	14:31.....	80, 365	17:25.....	449
10:36.....	11, 275	15:3.....	449	17:26.....	449
10:38.....	17	15:4-5.....	151	18:4-6.....	306
11:4.....	275	15:10.....	19, 50,	18:10-11.....	59
11:11-15.....	449		248, 281	18:11.....	238, 295, 301
11:25-26.....	49	15:13-15.....	129	18:12.....	306
11:43-44.....	20	15:16.....	190,	18:36.....	45
11:47-51.....	269		390, 449	18:37.....	351
11:52.....	200				

18:38.....	276, 360	5:29.....	256	28:25-28.....	127
19:9-11.....	254	5:31.....	129		
19:16-18.....	302	5:32.....	278, 428	Romans	
19:19-22.....	113	5:41.....	192	1:16.....	331
19:23-24.....	122	7:57-60.....	141	1:20.....	343
19:25.....	303	8:1.....	384	1:22.....	63
19:25-27.....	303	8:14-17.....	317	1:24-27.....	32
19:28.....	122	8:20.....	36	2:4.....	170
19:36.....	136	8:30-31.....	361	2:8-9.....	391
20:21.....	355	9:16.....	373	2:17-18.....	147
21:15-16.....	297	10:9-20.....	69	2:19-24.....	148
21:17.....	298	10:36.....	8, 322	2:24.....	259
		10:38.....	268	2:28-29.....	37,
Acts		10:44-47.....	317	.....	61, 412
1.....	7, 41	10:46.....	427	3:7-8.....	379
1:3.....	315	11:2-3.....	39	3:19.....	155, 159
1:6.....	65, 234, 249	11:15.....	427	3:21-22.....	165
1:12.....	281	11:16.....	317	3:23.....	49, 443
1:16.....	210	11:17-18.....	427	3:25.....	238
1:20.....	210	11:18.....	81	3:27-28.....	165
2.....	40, 41,	11:23.....	331	5:5.....	60, 332,
.....	44, 382, 449	13:39.....	42	.....	372, 449
2:1-4.....	38, 129, 425	13:46.....	126	5:6.....	438
2:1-11.....	316	14:11.....	229	5:7.....	238
2:4.....	338	14:22.....	192	5:12.....	49
2:17.....	44, 137	15:1-2.....	153	5:19.....	49
2:24.....	60, 419, 423	15:8.....	198, 298, 427	6:3.....	387
2:32-33.....	41	15:10.....	396	6:4.....	248, 390
2:33.....	38	16:16-23.....	33	6:6.....	160, 248
2:36.....	372	16:31.....	333	6:6-7.....	359
2:38.....	375	16:32-34.....	333	6:11.....	359
3:13.....	329	17:22.....	323	6:16-18.....	397
3:14-15.....	330	17:27.....	82	6:23.....	36
3:15.....	44	17:30.....	409	7:1.....	160
3:17.....	62	18:6.....	126	7:4.....	153
3:19.....	330	18:26.....	110	7:5.....	157
3:21.....	97	18:28.....	110	7:5-23.....	145
4:18-19.....	256	19:13-15.....	364	7:6.....	158
4:19.....	256	20:29-31.....	404	7:7.....	146
4:27-28.....	268	21:20.....	162	7:8.....	149
4:28.....	237	21:21.....	375	7:9.....	146
4:31.....	332	22:12-16.....	317	7:10.....	147
5:1-11.....	317	22:22.....	141	7:11.....	149
5:12.....	316	26:4-5.....	156	7:12.....	141, 146
5:15.....	316	28:3-6.....	229	7:13.....	154
5:16.....	317	28:23-24.....	126	7:14.....	146, 158

7:18.....	389	11:32.....	155	3:16.....	112	
7:21-22.....	154	11:33-34.....	220	3:22-23.....	356	
7:22.....	331	12:1.....	316	4:1.....	332	
7:23.....	155	12:18.....	347	4:3-5.....	298	
7:24.....	157	13.....	256	4:13.....	191	
7:25.....	157	13:1.....	254	5:1-3.....	353	
8:1.....	53	13:1-2.....	257, 343	5:1-5.....	299	
8:2.....	142, 247	13:2.....	255	5:4-5.....	354	
8:2-3.....	157	13:4-5.....	255, 257	5:7-8.....	440	
8:5.....	53	13:10.....	346	6:2-3.....	260	
8:7.....	50	13:13.....	362	8:5.....	323, 364	
8:7-8.....	53, 248	14:14.....	69, 436	8:9-12.....	259	
8:7-9.....	143	14:17.....	164	9:26-27.....	55	
8:8.....	390	14:19.....	347	9:27.....	222	
8:9.....	28, 50, 62, 331, 424, 449	15:3.....	20	10:1-4.....	137	
8:10.....	25, 50, 348, 350, 438	15:4.....	109, 262, 401	10:4.....	376	
8:13.....	53, 55, 248	15:8.....	331	10:11.....	172	
8:13-14.....	60	15:16.....	323, 331	10:11-12.....	224	
8:14.....	43, 151	15:33.....	347	10:15.....	5	
8:15-16.....	425	16:16.....	332	10:16.....	40	
8:17.....	260	1Corinthians			10:20.....	324
8:18.....	43, 56, 192, 373	1:4.....	102	10:21.....	411	
8:19.....	36, 45, 90	1:4-5.....	319	10:22.....	410	
8:26.....	417	1:9.....	102	10:32.....	45	
8:29.....	42, 102, 129	1:10.....	10, 92	11:1.....	378	
8:31-37.....	307	1:10-13.....	384, 404	11:3.....	358	
8:35.....	332	1:23.....	360	11:16.....	332	
8:38-39.....	308	1:24.....	99, 356, 360	11:27-29.....	223	
9:2-4.....	164	1:25.....	436	11:29-30.....	355	
9:4-5.....	164	1:26-27.....	79	12:1-2.....	426	
9:14-17.....	80	1:26-27.....	79	12:3.....	318, 372, 417, 424, 427	
9:18-21.....	81	1:29.....	151, 155	12:13.....	161, 387, 411	
9:19.....	222	2:4.....	387	13:12.....	83	
9:20-21.....	222	2:7-8.....	230	14:14.....	417	
9:22.....	222	2:7-9.....	103	14:21-22.....	108, 127, 424	
10:3.....	139, 164	2:9-10.....	46	15:24.....	334	
10:4.....	163	2:11-12.....	143	15:24-28.....	334	
10:9.....	333	2:11-14.....	30	15:26.....	49	
10:14-15.....	356, 361	2:12-14.....	67	15:27-28.....	10	
10:14-17.....	340	2:13-14.....	45	15:28.....	19, 334	
10:15.....	364	2:14.....	28, 30, 193	15:31.....	248, 359	
11:22.....	223, 365	2:14-15.....	48	15:34.....	190	
11:29.....	312	3:1-2.....	67	15:35-44.....	37	
		3:1-3.....	319			
		3:3-4.....	385			
		3:10.....	412			

15:39–41.....	32	1:6–7.....	383	1:11.....	31, 217, 418
15:41.....	354	1:11–12.....	161	1:15.....	335
15:45–47.....	16	1:13–14.....	156	2:5–6.....	48
15:56.....	154	1:15–16.....	360	2:8.....	70
		2:4.....	159	2:12.....	50
2Corinthians		2:4–5.....	153, 385	2:14–15.....	320
1:12.....	440	2:7.....	379	2:15.....	144, 227, 396
1:19–20.....	421	2:11–12.....	159	2:18.....	348
3:7–10.....	360, 398	2:13–16.....	160	3:3.....	83
3:7–11.....	319	2:16.....	360	3:4.....	332
3:14–15.....	91	2:19.....	153	3:4–5.....	84
3:14–16.....	95	2:19–20.....	248	3:8–9.....	81, 84
3:17.....	423, 428	3:1.....	386	3:9–10.....	183
4:3.....	81	3:1–3.....	159	3:10–11.....	84
4:5.....	360	3:3.....	386, 408	3:19.....	44
4:6.....	83	3:5.....	161	4:4–6.....	388, 412
4:7.....	49	3:13.....	137, 189	4:5.....	161
4:18.....	37, 399	3:20.....	10	4:8.....	123, 137, 310
5:2.....	37	3:21.....	145, 396	4:10.....	57
5:11.....	292	3:24.....	153	4:13.....	168
5:13–14.....	162	3:25.....	153	4:18.....	25, 299
5:16–17.....	162	3:27.....	387	4:22.....	248
5:17.....	36	3:28.....	37	4:24.....	227, 228, 248
5:19.....	112	4:4.....	3, 227, 238	4:25.....	441
5:21.....	21, 360	4:19–20.....	319	5:2.....	397
6:4.....	332	4:21–31.....	127	5:23.....	129
6:14–16.....	421	4:22–28.....	137	5:27.....	340
6:16.....	112	4:24.....	5	6:12.....	156, 246,
6:17.....	377	5:1.....	163, 258	.....	251, 252
9:15.....	43	5:3.....	153	6:19.....	91
10:4.....	407	5:4.....	159		
11:3.....	243	5:7–8.....	386	Philippians	
11:4.....	364	5:12.....	158, 385	1:10.....	331
11:10.....	331	5:13–14.....	259	1:15.....	362
11:13.....	355	5:16.....	142, 145, 247	1:15–16.....	360
11:13–14.....	279	5:16–23.....	54	1:29.....	373
11:13–15.....	386	5:17.....	246, 359,	2:1–2.....	92
11:14.....	221	.....	397, 438	2:2.....	10
11:15.....	280	5:18.....	161	2:5.....	354
11:24–27.....	152	5:22–23.....	142, 440	2:5–8.....	326
12:2–4.....	69, 152	6:2.....	331	2:6–8.....	16
12:7.....	299	6:16.....	103, 407	2:7.....	52, 272
13:11.....	10			2:8.....	228
		Ephesians		2:9–11.....	337
Galatians		1:9.....	91	2:10–11.....	334
1:6.....	331	1:10.....	311	2:13.....	50, 408

3:3.....	54, 412	1Thessalonians	2:9.....	17, 25
3:4-6.....	155	1:5.....	2:11-13.....	11
3:5-8.....	399	3:13.....	2:14.....	227
3:7-8.....	70	5:12-13.....	2:14-15.....	144
3:7-9.....	153	5:14.....	2:14-16.....	16
3:8.....	56, 332, 333	5:19.....	2:15.....	166, 438
3:9.....	139		2:16.....	17
3:10.....	56	2Thessalonians	2:17.....	129
3:11.....	57	3:9.....	4:2.....	361
3:17.....	351, 378		4:12.....	198, 320
3:18-19.....	385	1Timothy	4:14.....	129
3:21.....	38	1:17.....	4:14-16.....	322
4:9.....	365	1:20.....	4:15.....	20, 248, 292
		2:1-2.....	5:7.....	19, 20,
Colossians		2:5.....	.....	80, 350, 365
1:4.....	335	3:9.....	5:8.....	243, 264
1:10.....	50, 69	3:16.....	5:12-13.....	319
1:13.....	43, 259	4:1.....	5:13-14.....	168
1:15-17.....	4	6:10.....	5:14.....	378
1:16.....	242, 265		6:1.....	331, 360, 399
1:17.....	44, 322	2Timothy	7:2.....	17
1:17-18.....	9	1:6.....	7:3.....	17, 111, 112
1:19.....	43	1:15.....	7:25.....	321
1:20.....	311	2:4.....	7:26.....	57, 337
1:25-27.....	85	2:11-12.....	8:1-2.....	315
1:27.....	50	2:20-21.....	8:6.....	320
2:2.....	332	3:5.....	8:8-10.....	397
2:2-3.....	167	3:12.....	8:8-11.....	47
2:3.....	125, 140		9:11-12.....	136, 311
2:5.....	335	Titus	9:12.....	38
2:8.....	339	1:2.....	9:14.....	40, 360,
2:9.....	43	1:15.....	.....	399, 412
2:10.....	161, 410	2:10.....	9:15.....	238
2:11-12.....	86	2:11-12.....	9:18-23.....	310
2:12.....	412	3:5.....	9:19-20.....	40
2:14.....	68, 396	3:5-6.....	9:22.....	41
2:14-15.....	320		9:23.....	311
2:16-17.....	161, 262,	Hebrews	9:27.....	28
.....	398	1:1-2.....	10:5.....	11, 15, 227
2:20-21.....	160	1:2.....	10:5-7.....	12
2:22.....	161	1:3.....	10:10.....	36
3:1-3.....	359	1:8-9.....	10:20.....	316
3:3.....	45, 90	1:8-10.....	10:21.....	315
3:16.....	332	1:14.....	10:22.....	41
4:3.....	91	2.....	10:28-29.....	158
		2:7.....	10:29.....	40, 422

10:34.....	192	2:9.....	340	1:8-10.....	49
11:6.....	318	2:11.....	36	2:1.....	319
11:7.....	362	2:13-14.....	253	2:6.....	50
11:8-10.....	138	2:17-18.....	254	2:16.....	243
11:13.....	43, 199	2:22.....	20	2:18.....	300
11:16.....	43, 437	3:16.....	43	2:22.....	334, 420
11:25.....	192	3:18-19.....	315	2:22-24.....	335
11:26.....	72	3:19.....	12, 123	2:23.....	332
11:36.....	191	4:11.....	377	2:24.....	420
11:37-38.....	192	4:12-14.....	374	2:27.....	144
11:39.....	199	4:17.....	311	3:1.....	36, 45, 90, 102
12:6.....	221	5:3.....	378	3:1-2.....	37
12:7-8.....	173	5:8.....	280, 312	3:2.....	45, 90
12:24.....	40			3:8.....	413
12:26-27.....	105	2Peter		3:9.....	36
13:2.....	89	1:2.....	332	3:14.....	37
13:7.....	260, 351	1:4.....	43, 145	3:16.....	397
13:12-13.....	429	2:1.....	430	3:24.....	423
13:17.....	260, 354	2:1-2.....	383, 428	4:2-3.....	426
13:20.....	347	2:1-3.....	415	4:6.....	46
13:24.....	260	2:2.....	407	4:7-11.....	344
		2:4.....	171, 176	4:8.....	14
James		2:10.....	358, 374	4:12.....	345
1:14.....	246	2:12.....	358	4:16.....	14
1:17.....	151, 170	2:12-16.....	433	4:17.....	51, 68, 147
1:20.....	292	2:13-15.....	171	4:18.....	350
1:25.....	142, 320	2:17.....	377	4:19.....	29
1:27.....	403	2:17-19.....	434	5:1.....	36
2:10.....	139, 420	2:20.....	434	5:3.....	360
2:12.....	142	2:21-22.....	435	5:6.....	318, 423, 426
2:19.....	323, 364	3:7.....	322	5:9.....	427
2:23.....	67	3:7-14.....	55	5:9-10.....	426
2:26.....	25	3:9.....	205	5:10.....	278, 317, 426
3:14-15.....	433	3:10-14.....	56	5:13.....	319
4:4.....	379	3:12.....	331	5:19.....	415
5:2.....	202	3:13.....	260	5:20.....	213, 299, 323
5:11.....	321	3:15.....	191		
		3:15-16.....	380	3John	
1Peter		3:18.....	69	1:4.....	319
1:2.....	40				
1:10.....	128	1John		Jude	
1:10-11.....	280	1:1.....	52, 109	1:1.....	11
1:10-12.....	8, 30, 98	1:1-2.....	52	1:6.....	176
1:12.....	28, 45, 85,	1:2.....	52	1:9.....	203
.....	183, 233, 377	1:3.....	92, 102	1:14.....	137
2:5.....	413	1:7.....	348		

Revelation	20:4.....45, 260
1:5-6.....199	20:10.....267, 380
1:6.....90	20:14-15.....267, 380
1:13-15.....87	21:1.....55, 260
2:6.....292	21:8.....438
2:14.....379	21:17.....89
2:15.....292	21:24.....260
2:17.....89	22:13.....4
3:4.....202	
3:7.....125	
3:14.....4, 9	
3:16.....421	
3:18.....129	
3:19.....220, 221	
6:10.....207	
6:11.....207	
7:14.....40	
9:11.....89	
10:7.....91	
12:3-4.....174	
12:7-9.....253, 314	
12:9.....174, 176, .....243, 311, .....323, 405, 415	
12:10.....201	
12:12.....312, 313, .....353, 414	
12:13.....422	
12:15-17.....263	
12:16.....134	
12:17.....423	
15:4.....174	
16:13-16.....252	
17:1.....387	
17:5.....387	
17:6.....387	
17:15.....134	
17:16.....419	
17:16-17.....429	
18:4-5.....391, 429	
18:15-19.....419	
19:8.....202	
19:10.....47	
19:11-15.....249	
19:11-21.....133	
20:2.....243	