

# TODAY'S THOUGHTS



VOLUME 3

WILLIAM E. WRIGHT



# Today's Thoughts

## Volume 3

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William E. Wright

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Doctrinal Ministries  
Houston, Texas

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**For God so loved the world that He gave His only  
begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should  
not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16**

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Eastern Screech Owl winking, Houston, Texas

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## Preface

This is a book of Bible study devotionals. These originated with almost daily emails I sent to family members and a few close friends. My daughter and grandson surprised me on my birthday by assembling the first several months of devotionals into Volume One with enough copies for the people on the email list. A few days later my sister-in-law independently suggested that I should put the devotionals into a book. That was the origin of Volume Two.

I have been a serious student of the Bible for over seventy years. God has blessed me with excellent pastors throughout this time who have taught God's word verse by verse. They did not all agree in their understanding of every verse, but they all followed a literal, historical, grammatical interpretation of the Bible.

The two key interpretative standards to which I hold and will be found throughout these devotionals are: First, salvation is by faith alone, in Christ alone. Salvation is entirely the work of God and does not require any works from people either before or after believing in Jesus Christ. Eph. 2:8-9 confirms this, "For by grace you have been saved by faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." In Acts 16:30-31 when the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas "What must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." Second, from the standpoint of prophecy, I hold to a Dispensational, Pre-Tribulational, Pre-Millennial interpretation of the Bible. This understanding of prophecy follows the literal interpretation of the word of Scripture. It does allow for the use of figures of speech and analogies as any normal writing does.

Each page is a stand-alone devotional. I have ordered the devotionals in Bible order. This is not the chronological order in which I wrote and emailed the devotionals.

I chose the passages of Scripture in each devotional from a list of verses I considered significant enough to want to memorize. In *Today's Thoughts*, Volume 2, I have a page of tips I have found useful for memorizing Scripture. After looking at several cell phone apps for memorizing Scripture, I found *Verse Locker*® which is flexible and provides a wide choice of Bible translations for memorizing. *Verse Locker*® also allows the creation of collections of verses by topic.

Moses commanded the people of Israel to memorize the Law in Deut. 6:6, "These words which I command you today shall be in your heart." The psalmist wrote in Psa. 119:1, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You!" Memorizing is not difficult. Until we had autodial functions on our phones, I used to know all my friends' phone numbers by heart. Now, I have trouble remembering my own phone number sometimes. Pick a verse. Write it out or copy it. Put it up on a prominent place in your home where you will see it often. Perhaps on the mirror where you do your hair every day or shave. Then review it daily until you can repeat it from memory. Then work on a second verse. But don't forget to go back and review the verse or verses you previously memorized.

It is my prayer that God will bless you through reading these devotionals.



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1 Sam. 16:13-16. Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel arose and went to Ramah. But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the LORD troubled him. And Saul's servants said to him, "Surely, a distressing spirit from God is troubling you. "Let our master now command your servants, *who are* before you, to seek out a man *who is* a skillful player on the harp; and it shall be that he will play it with his hand when the distressing spirit from God is upon you, and you shall be well."

Understanding these verses is a challenge to us because we read them with a New Testament mindset. The ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament differs from the Spirit's New Testament ministry. But first, I need to consider what has happened previously in 1 Samuel. The book of Judges ended with this sad verse, Jud. 21:25 . "In those days *there was* no king in Israel; everyone did *what was right* in his own eyes." God brings Samuel on the scene and he does well as a judge and leader of Israel. But as Samuel grew old, the people of Israel looked around. They did not see a good successor to Samuel. They saw that the surrounding nations had kings. So the Israelites wanted to be like the world and have a king. They were not waiting on the Lord to see what God would do. The elders of Israel come to Samuel and in 1 Sam. 8:5, say to him, "Look you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." I am not to look to the world to find out how to handle the problems and difficulties of life. God has provided the answers in His word. I need to wait for Him and His solutions. Samuel took these demands to the Lord and the Lord gave Israel their demand. This reminds me of Rom. 1:24-28 that tells us what God does with people who continue to live in sin. "God gives them up to more sins. Like interest, sins compound into even more sin. God gave Saul to Israel as king.

For a while Saul did well. But then 1 Sam. 13 comes along. Saul leads Israel's army into a battle with the Amalekites. God's command to Saul was to completely destroy the idolatrous Amalekites. 1 Sam. 15:3 is God's marching orders to Saul, "kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey." Saul disobeyed. He spared the Amalekite's king, Agag, and allowed the soldiers to keep some animals as plunder. God tells Samuel to confront Saul for his sin and then has Samuel anoint David as a future king to replace Saul. That brings us to today's verses.

"Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward." In the New Testament, believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and are commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). In the Old Testament the ministry of the Spirit was limited to a few people. As in Saul's case, this ministry could be lost. In the New Testament, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is permanent for the believer's life. The filling of the Holy Spirit, being commanded, depends on the believer's obedience to and walk with God.

With the departure of the Holy Spirit from Saul, he lost God's protective shield against demonic attack. God, in his providence, provided David upon whom the Holy Spirit had come to offset the demonic attacks on Saul. But as the story continues to unfold in the following chapters of 1 Samuel, Saul's sins continue to compound. As a believer I cannot lose the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. But I need to learn God's word and obey it. When I fail and disobey God, I must not let that sin compound. I need to follow David's example when he sinned. Psa. 51:3. "For I acknowledged my transgressions, And my sin *is* always before me." In the New Testament we have 1 John 1:9. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

2 Sam. 7:12-16. "When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. "He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. "I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. "But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took *it* from Saul, whom I removed from before you. "And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.""

This is a part of what is known as the Dravidic Covenant. This was God's promise to David. God had made a similar promise or covenant with Abraham. God promised Abraham land, seed and blessing. At the time Abraham was childless and had not yet come to the land that God was promising to give him. In 2 Sam. 5 David had won a victory over the Philistines. In 2 Sam. 6 David brings the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. Then in 2 Sam. 7:1, David "was dwelling in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies all around." David was thinking about what he could do next. He decided it was time to build a house (temple) for the LORD. He talks to the prophet, Nathan, who liked the idea. But then God told Nathan that David should not build the temple. Instead, God makes these promises to David. We call these promises that God made to both Abraham and to David, "unconditional covenants." God obligated Himself to fulfill these promises. There were no requirements on either Abraham's or on David's part that they had to do to receive these promises.

"When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers." The time of the fulfillment of these promises to David would be in the future, after David had died. "I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body." The timing here is future, but Nathan probably gave this promise to David at a time after David's successor, Solomon, had been born. Since this Seed is future, Nathan must be referring to the future birth and eventual reign of Jesus Christ, as Israel's Messiah.

"He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." Now David's son who succeeded David as king in Israel, did build a magnificent temple for the worship of the LORD. But Ezekiel 40-43 describes the Temple that the Messiah will build during the Millennial Kingdom. Solomon builds a temple and Jesus Christ builds a temple. The promise here could refer to either one and perhaps both are in view.

I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. Well, Solomon lived and died. When Jesus returns at His second advent, He will finally take His place as king over the entire world. There will be an initial rule for the 1,000 year Millennium followed by the eternal New Heaven and New Earth.

"I will be his Father, and he shall be My son." Jesus is correctly called the Son of God. "But My mercy shall not depart from him." Solomon is in view again as well as the subsequent kings. This is an unconditional promise of God. Even though Solomon failed, particularly in his later years when he married too many foreign wives who brought into Israel the worship of these wives' false gods.

The intrusion of idolatry was covered by the warning in 2 Sam. 7:14. "If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and the blows of the sons of men." This happened multiple times in succeeding generations with dire consequences to Judah and Israel. The warning to me is that God does discipline me when I step out of line. Heb. 12:5-11.

2 Sam. 23:1-4. Now these *are* the last words of David. *Thus* says David the son of Jesse; *Thus* says the man raised up on high, The anointed of the God of Jacob, And the sweet psalmist of Israel: "The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, And His word was on my tongue. The God of Israel said, The Rock of Israel spoke to me: 'He who rules over men *must be* just, Ruling in the fear of God. And *he shall be* like the light of the morning *when* the sun rises, A morning without clouds, *Like* the tender grass *springing* out of the earth, By clear shining after rain.'

"*Thus* says David the son of Jesse." Jesse was a shepherd in Bethlehem. David was his youngest son. David is talking about his humble beginning. From the viewpoint of the world, there was nothing in David's origins to point to him as Israel's greatest king. But God knew better. David's victory over Goliath is a well-known story. King Saul scoffed when David volunteered to take up Goliath's challenge. David knew that God would defend His name. David says in 1 Sam. 17: 37, "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." I like what one of the commentators Dr. Constable quotes in his *Notes* says, "when Saul tried to arm David with armor, a helmet and a sword and David rejected them. Saul tried to turn David into an armadillo, ... David preferred the simple weapon that he could handle best: his sling." David says that he was "the man raised up on high" by God, "anointed by the God of Jacob."

"The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me." When Samuel anointed David as the future king of Israel in 1 Sam. 16:13, the Holy Spirit came upon David to enable him to fulfill God's plans and purposes through him. This included the writing of the various psalms and Scriptures that David wrote. Peter tells us in 2 Pet. 1:20-21, "no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit." "All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16).

"He who rules over men *must be* just, Ruling in the fear of God." David made some mistakes in his life, but this is the guiding principle that directed him as the leader in Israel. The same principle applies to a person in any position of authority. This would include managers, employers, presidents of businesses, leaders in any organization. Paul wrote in Rom. 13:1, "There is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God." Do I obey all the laws, rules and regulations that our governments impose on us? I used to think that there is a tolerance of 5 or 10 miles per hour above the speed laws. I can drive fast and I am OK if I am not caught. But that is not what Rom 13 teaches. I don't always obey as I should, but I do make it a practice to set the speed control on my car to the speed limit or below and let everyone else pass me.

"And *he shall be* like the light of the morning *when* the sun rises, A morning without clouds, *Like* the tender grass *springing* out of the earth, By clear shining after rain." Who is the great King who will rule for all eternity in the fear of God? Both Dr. Constable's *Notes* and Dr. J. Vernon McGee see a reference to Jesus Christ as Israel's Messiah in this verse. The sun and rain enable grass to grow and produce food for animals and people. Just rulers hold the promise of peace, joy and blessing to the people they govern. These in turn result in economic prosperity that benefits the nation which is governed well.

2 Sam. 23:5-7. "Although my house *is* not so with God, Yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, Ordered in all *things* and secure. For *this is* all my salvation and all *my* desire; Will He not make *it* increase? But *the sons* of rebellion *shall* all *be* as thorns thrust away, Because they cannot be taken with hands. But the man *who* touches them Must be armed with iron and the shaft of a spear, And they shall be utterly burned with fire in *their* place."

"Although my house is not so with God, Yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant." David is talking about what we call the "Davidic Covenant." 2 Sam. 7:16. "And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever." "My house is not so with God." David is saying that he was not worthy of this promise from God. This forever promise to David includes the prophecy that the Messiah would be a descendant of David.

"Ordered in all *things* and secure." God has made this promise. It will happen. God is faithful. What He has promised He will do. "Will He not make it increase?" A promise by God is a sure thing. The fulfillment of that promise can neither be greater nor less than what God has promised. I take this final rhetorical question simply as David's assurance that God will keep His promise.

These "*sons of rebellion*" sound like a reference to David's enemies. The *King James Bible* transliterates the word translated "rebellion" as "Belial." I checked several commentaries and they all ignored this verse. "They cannot be taken with hands." That may better fit with Satan and his fallen angels than with people. Even Goliath was not invincible as David demonstrated with God's help. "The man *who* touches them must be armed with iron and the shaft of a spear." Anyone involved with these "*sons of rebellion*" must be well armed. David could be using hyperbole to describe his enemies, comparing them to unbelievers. He states their destiny which fits both Satan and his fallen angels as well as unbelievers. "They shall be utterly burned with fire in *their* place."

Today, teaching regarding this promised kingdom is confusing. Bible teachers and preachers understand the subject in different ways. Too many have adopted the ideas of Augustine who rejected the literal interpretation of Scripture about the kingdom and turned to allegory. The Roman church would convert the whole world and usher in the kingdom. That hasn't happened. Many think that God will fulfill His promises to Abraham and David through the Church. This idea says that the Church replaces Israel in Bible prophecy. That doesn't fit well with David's statement that God's everlasting covenant is "Ordered in all *things* and secure." Then there are some who think the kingdom is a completely spiritual kingdom. Another popular idea today is that the "kingdom is already, but not yet." This kind of teaching is oxymoronic. The kingdom is either here or it ain't. When I read the descriptions of the kingdom in the Bible, the present world does not fit what the Bible says. Jesus Christ is sitting at the right hand of the Father's throne. Jesus is not sitting on His throne ruling the world. Satan is still the ruler of this world. Israel's promised kingdom is yet future.

This shows what happens when a person, like Augustine, twists the clear teaching of Scripture. As the writer of Hebrews warns in Heb. 2:1, "Therefore we must give the most earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away." Augustine rejected the idea of the prophesied Millennial Kingdom. Ever since, people have taken his false ideas and further twisted and manipulated them, drifting further from the truth. We have a proliferation of different ideas about our marvelous future with God. I pray that I am not following the traditions of men, but correctly understanding Scripture.

1 Kings 8:46-50. "When they sin against You (for *there is* no one who does not sin), and You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to the land of the enemy, far or near; "yet when they come to themselves in the land where they were carried captive, and repent, and make supplication to You in the land of those who took them captive, saying, 'We have sinned and done wrong, we have committed wickedness'; "and *when* they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who led them away captive, and pray to You toward their land which You gave to their fathers, the city which You have chosen and the temple which I have built for Your name: "then hear in heaven Your dwelling place their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause, "and forgive Your people who have sinned against You, and all their transgressions which they have transgressed against You; and grant them compassion before those who took them captive, that they may have compassion on them.

Solomon is speaking at the dedication of the Temple he has built for Israel. Solomon knew the Old Testament Law. He is speaking here of principles taught in Lev. 26 and Deut. 30. "When they sin against You (for *there is* no one who does not sin)." This sounds like the Old Testament version of Rom. 3:23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

"And You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to the land of the enemy." Lev. 26:14-35 lists five cycles of discipline that God would bring to Israel if the people were disobedient to God. Solomon discusses the fifth cycle from Lev. 26:25-35. In the fifth cycle Israel is led away captive to a foreign land. Lev. 26:34-35 specifies how long the captivity will be. The length of the captivity will be for the number of Sabbaths that Israel had not observed. That is the number of Sabbatical years in which Israel did not rest.

Lev. 26:40-45 says that God has not cast Israel away and will not utterly destroy them. These verses also tell Israel what the people have to do to be restored. Solomon's statements also recall Deut. 30:1-3 where God through Moses tells Israel what they must do to be restored. "Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call *them* to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, ..." The two requirements that God gave to Israel to be restored from captivity were to "return to the LORD your God and obey" the commandments. At the end of the seventy year Babylonian captivity, in Dan. 9:3-19 Daniel makes his prayer of confession for the children of Israel.

"Solomon said, "yet when they come to themselves in the land where they were carried captive, and repent, and make supplication to you in the land of those who took them captive, saying, 'We have sinned and done wrong, we have committed wickedness'; ..." In Deut. 30:2, we have the word "return." Then in 1 Kings 8:47 the same Hebrew word is translated "repent;" but 1 Kings 8:48 translates the same word as "return." This is John the Baptist's message to the Jews in Matt. 3:2 "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The Jews knew exactly what John was saying. Today we don't know the Old Testament well. If the Jews had returned to faith in God and in their Messiah, Jesus Christ, the rule of the Romans would have ended and Jesus, their Messiah, would have established His promised kingdom. Now the world is still waiting for the time when the Jews will return to faith in Jesus Christ and for His return to establish His kingdom.

2 Kings 6:15-20. And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who *are* with us *are* more than those who *are* with them." And Elisha prayed, and said, "LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain *was* full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. So when *the Syrians* came down to him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, and said, "Strike this people, I pray, with blindness." And He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. Now Elisha said to them, "This *is* not the way, nor *is* this the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." But he led them to Samaria. So it was, when they had come to Samaria, that Elisha said, "LORD, open the eyes of these *men*, that they may see." And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and there *they were*, inside Samaria!

This is an interesting story which is why I chose this passage from 2 Kings. Elisha is the successor prophet to Elijah. The events of this story take place in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The king of Israel at this time was Jehoram, the son of Ahab. 2 Kings 3:2 says Jehoram "did evil in the sight of the LORD, but not like his father and mother; for he put away the *sacred* pillar of Baal that his father had made." The phrase "did evil in the sight of the LORD" was true of every one of the kings of the Northern Kingdom. This tells us that they worshiped the idols and false gods of their unbelieving neighbors. Still Israel was God's people and Elisha was ministering to Israel, as well as to Judah. Syria was at war with Israel. The king of Syria was trying to figure out how the king of Israel knew what Syria was doing. 2 Kings 6:12 tells us. "One of his (king of Syria's) servants said, 'None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who *is* in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom.'" So the king of Syria sent his army to get Elisha.

"The servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army surrounding the city." Elisha is not concerned. He tells his servant, "Do not fear, for those who *are* with us *are* more than those who *are* with them." Then Elisha prays and the Lord shows Elisha's servant a mountain full of an angelic army. Psa. 24:7 says, "The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them." Nothing happens to me that God does not know would happen. I can know that God has provided for every eventuality. 1 Cor. 10:13, "No temptation (test, trial) has overtaken you except such as is common to man; But God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted (tested) beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

"So when the Syrians came down to him, Elisha prayed." Same story, but different characters. Here is a squadron or army of Syrians which had come to take Elisha back to the king of Syria. God answers Elisha's prayer and blinds the Syrians. Elisha "befriends" the Syrians and leads them to Samaria, the capital of Israel, perhaps ten miles away. The Syrians' intended captive has turned the tables on them and the Syrians are now the captives. Who says God does not have a sense of humor! In the next verses, the king of Israel asks Elisha if he should kill the Syrian prisoners. Elisha says "No." 2 Kings 6:23 says that the king "prepared a great feast for them." The result: Israel enjoyed an interim time of peace with the Syrians.

Today is not a time of spectacular miracles like these. But I can still follow Elisha's example of prayer. God has already solved my problems. Sometimes I need to wait for God's solution, not mine.

1 Chron. 16:31-36. Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; And let them say among the nations, "The LORD reigns." Let the sea roar, and all its fullness; Let the field rejoice, and all that *is* in it. Then the trees of the woods shall rejoice before the LORD, For He is coming to judge the earth. Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is good!* For His mercy *endures* forever. And say, "Save us, O God of our salvation; Gather us together, and deliver us from the Gentiles, To give thanks to Your holy name, To triumph in Your praise." Blessed *be* the LORD God of Israel From everlasting to everlasting! And all the people said, "Amen!" and praised the LORD.

These verses are at the end of a psalm that David handed to Asaph, 1 Chron. 16:7. The occasion was David's having the Ark of the Covenant brought into Jerusalem. During the reign of Saul, the Ark had been captured by the Philistines. They placed the ark in the temple of the idol, Dagon. During the two nights it was in the temple, the idol fell down before the Ark. The idol's head and hands were broken off (1 Sam. 5:1-5). The Philistines kept the Ark for seven months and suffered with sickness. Finally, they got smart and sent it back to Israel. After its return the Ark was kept by Israel in a safe place. This is a psalm of thanksgiving and praise to God as David had it brought into Jerusalem.

The book of Chronicles is believed to have been written by Ezra after the return of a remnant of the Jews from captivity in Babylon. It was written to recount to the Jews some of the great things God had done for them. The Jews needed encouragement. Even though they were still under the rule of a foreign nation, God would keep his promises of a future restoration of the Kingdom. "Let them say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns.'" Israel was chosen by God to be a testimony to the rest of the world about God.

Today's verses reminded the Jews of God's prophesied promises to Israel. "The LORD reigns." God is sovereign. He allows people to do their thing on earth. (Although Satan is the present ruler of this world.) But the time is coming when the Messiah, Jesus Christ, will come and will rule the entire world. "For He is coming to judge the earth." When Jesus Christ returns, He will judge the nations to determine who will be allowed into the promised Kingdom. This is sometimes called the Sheep and Goats Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46). This judgment appears to take place on earth since Jesus has returned to the earth and destroyed the armies of the Antichrist. At least seven years earlier Jesus Christ will have returned to the air and all the believers will have been caught up to meet Him (1 Thess. 4:16-17). These believers go with Jesus to heaven where their lives will be evaluated at the Judgment Seat of Christ. This is one of the reasons why I understand the Rapture and Jesus' Second Coming as two different events.

"Let the sea roar, ... Let the field rejoice ..." In the future Kingdom promised to Israel, nature will continue to function. Grass will grow in the fields to provide food for the cattle and sheep. The moon will continue to produce tides along the seashore. The waves will still be there for surfers. But this is not the future New Heaven and New Earth because Rev. 21:1, tells us, "There was no more sea."

I can also follow the example of this psalm in how I give thanks or praise God. They were praying that God would fulfill His revealed will and regather Israel. The people did not simply chant by rote, "Praise the LORD," or "hallelujah." The psalm was read and they responded, "Amen," "I believe it." The Jews acknowledged their faith in the content of the psalm. "Yahweh reigns." "He is coming to judge the earth." The psalm also contained a prayer, "Gather us together, and deliver us from the Gentiles." The writer of this psalm understood the promised regathering of all Israel to the Land.

2 Chron. 32:7-8. "Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid nor dismayed before the king of Assyria, nor before all the multitude that *is* with him; for *there are* more with us than with him. "With him *is* an arm of flesh; but with us *is* the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles." And the people were strengthened by the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.

This passage recalls a couple of others. When Joshua was preparing to the enter the promised land in Josh. 1:8, he encouraged the people of Israel saying, "Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as a inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them." In 2 Kings 6:16 Elisha's servant discovered a Syrian army camped outside the city. He returned to Elisha terror stricken. Elisha encouraged his servant, "Do not fear, for those who *are* with us *are* more than those who *are* with them." Hezekiah encourages the people of Jerusalem with very similar words. What is going on in this section of Chronicles?

Years before, Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, had entered into an alliance with Assyria to protect Judah when the Syrians had attacked him (2 Kings 16:7). 2 Kings 16:2-4 says of Ahaz that "he did not do *what was* right in the sight of the LORD his God." The specific disobedience was that Ahaz turned to idol worship as all the kings of Israel (Northern Kingdom) did. Even the alliance with Assyria was prohibited in the Law God gave to Moses. Now Hezekiah is king in Judah. 2 Kings 18:3 says that Hezekiah "did *what was* right in the sight of the LORD." In 2 Kings 18:7 Hezekiah broke the treaty with Assyria. "He rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him." By this time Assyria was the dominant world power. They had already conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel and carried all the survivors off to distant lands (the supposed "ten lost tribes"). 2 Chron. 31:21 makes an important statement with regard to Hezekiah. "In every work that he began in the service of the house of God, in the law and in the commandment, to seek his God, he did *it* with all his heart. So he prospered." God promised Moses that if Israel obeyed the Lord that He would prosper them.

This brings us to today's verses. Sennacherib King of Assyria has invaded Judah and captured many cities. He has started his siege of Jerusalem. Like Elisha's servant, the citizens of Jerusalem are worrying about what happens next. Hezekiah says. "Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid nor dismayed before the king of Assyria, nor before" his army of 185,000. "*There are* more with us than with him. ... with us *is* the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles."

*The Expositor's Bible Commentary* in discussing what happened next says: "The event ranks, in fact, with Israel's crossing of the Red Sea as one of the two greatest examples of the Lord's intervention to save His people." 2 Kings 19:35 describes this intervention. "And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when *people* arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead." Judah was spared from destruction and disaster for close to one hundred more years. But the people continued to listen to their neighbors and turn to worshiping the neighbor's idols. The result was that Babylon conquered Judah and took the people into captivity. Today we are a lot smarter. We don't worship idols of wood, stone, or precious metals. But we also have a lot of ideas floating around this world that doesn't believe God exists. Through education and our government leaders we are told that we can build a better world. For me, I want to learn the Truth from God's word. I don't want to conform my thinking to that of the world. That is what Israel and Judah continually did when they worshiped false idols. I want to transform my mind through God's word (Rom. 12:2).

Ezra 7:10. For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.

In these devotionals I do a lot of reviewing of the context and discussing what the Holy Spirit is trying to convey through the words of the human writers and as the original readers would have understood them. Dr. Israel P. Loken's "Forward" in his commentary on *Ezra* quotes an 1885 book, *Biblical Hermeneutic* (interpretation) by R. S. Terry. The quote explains well why I spend so much time on the background of the Bible passages. Dr. Terry wrote: "In all our private study of the Scriptures for personal edification we do well to remember that the first and great thing is to lay hold of the real spirit and meaning of the sacred writer. There can be no true application, and no profitable taking to ourselves of any lessons of the Bible, unless we first clearly apprehend their original meaning and reference. To build a moral lesson upon an erroneous interpretation of the language of God's word is a reprehensible procedure. But he who clearly discerns the exact grammatico-historical sense of a passage is the better qualified to give it any legitimate application which its language and context will allow."

Dr. Loken is an Old Testament expert. We attended the same church for more than ten years. I have been privileged to hear him teach through the Minor Prophets. He writes in his commentary on *Ezra*, "The first verse of Ezra records the fulfillment of two of the most amazing prophecies in history. First, the Lord, speaking through the prophet Isaiah demonstrated His sovereignty by predicting the rise of Cyrus almost 200 years before he came to power. Second, the Lord, this time speaking through the prophet Jeremiah, further demonstrated His sovereignty by predicting that the nation would remain in exile for seventy years." These Bible references are Isa. 44:28-45:1 and Jer. 25:11.

The book of Ezra begins with the return of the first group of Jews from Babylon in 538 BC. Rebuilding Jerusalem was not easy and they faced opposition from their neighbors. The rebuilding of the temple was finished in 515 B.C. Ezra comes on the scene in Ezra 7:1. Ezra 7:6 says of Ezra, himself: "This Ezra came up from Babylon; and he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given. The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him." This is 458 B.C. The walls around Jerusalem have yet to be rebuilt.

Dr. Loken writes about Ezra 7:10 far better than I can. (He begins by quoting the preceding phrase Ezra 7:9.) "This is one of the most amazing verses in the entire Bible. The conjunction 'for' connects this verse to the preceding phrase 'the good hand of his God was upon him.' In other words, the reason the good hand of God was upon Ezra was because of the things described in this verse. As a result, this verse can be perceived as detailing a four-step formula for gaining the favor of the Lord. First, Ezra 'set his heart.' The scribe determined within his heart that he would faithfully and resolutely commit himself to the habits detailed in the rest of the verse. Second, Ezra studied the law of the Lord. The scribe devoted his life to the reading and analysis of God's word. Third, Ezra practiced the law of the Lord. The scribe's examination of the scriptures was not simply a growth of knowledge. He applied that knowledge to his life. Fourth, Ezra taught the law throughout Israel. The scribe did not keep the things he learned to himself. He taught them to others." This four-step formula is an example for me to follow. 1). Make the study God's word a priority. 2). Follow through on the priority. Learn God's word. 3). Apply God's word. 4). 2 Tim. 2:2, "the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others."

Neh. 1:5-11. And I said: "I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, *You* who keep *Your* covenant and mercy with those who love *You* and observe *Your* commandments, "please let *Your* ear be attentive and *Your* eyes open, that *You* may hear the prayer of *Your* servant which I pray before *You* now, day and night, for the children of Israel *Your* servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against *You*. Both my father's house and I have sinned. "We have acted very corruptly against *You*, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which *You* commanded *Your* servant Moses. "Remember, I pray, the word that *You* commanded *Your* servant Moses, saying, '*If* you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; 'but *if* you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, *yet* I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.' "Now these *are* *Your* servants and *Your* people, whom *You* have redeemed by *Your* great power, and by *Your* strong hand. "O Lord, I pray, please let *Your* ear be attentive to the prayer of *Your* servant, and to the prayer of *Your* servants who desire to fear *Your* name; and let *Your* servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." For I was the king's cupbearer.

Nehemiah prayed this prayer 500 years before John wrote 1 John 5:14, "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." This is exactly the way Nehemiah prayed. Nehemiah's prayer follows what God had told Moses in Deut. 30:1-3. Nehemiah knew the Scripture of his day. So he knew how to pray according to God's will. In Deut. 30 God had told Moses that if the people of Israel disobeyed Him, they would be taken out of the Promised Land. This had happened and the Jews were taken into captivity in Babylon. Later, Babylon is conquered by the Persians. After seventy years of captivity, a small remnant of the Jews had returned to Jerusalem and began rebuilding the temple in 536 B.C. Now almost 100 years later, Nehemiah in the service of King Artaxerxes, receives a report that "the survivors" in Jerusalem are "in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem *is* also broken down" (Neh. 1:3). The report resulted in Nehemiah's prayer. In Neh. 2 the king gives Nehemiah permission to return to Jerusalem. Nehemiah returns and serves as governor in Jerusalem.

Artaxerxes' order to Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall starts the time running on the prophecy of Dan. 9:25, "Know therefore and understand, *That* from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, *There shall be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times." This is the "seventy weeks" prophecy of Dan. 9:24. Four hundred and eighty-three years elapsed between Artaxerxes' order and the week of Jesus' crucifixion.

The Jews of Jesus' day knew the requirements of Deut. 30:1-3 as repeated in Nehemiah's prayer. John the Baptist's message, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2) was straight out of Deut. 30. Since the time of Nehemiah, the Jews had kept the Law God gave to Moses and had not returned to idols. But they needed to return to faith in God. They thought they were saved by being children of Abraham and their obedience to the Law. If Jerome had correctly translated the Greek word he translated as "repent" and had translated it "return" (or "change your mind"), we might better understand John's message. Salvation has always been through faith in what God has revealed in His word. "And he (Abraham) believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:3).

May I learn to pray as Nehemiah did, guided by what God has revealed of His will in the Bible.

Esther 4:16-17. "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which *is* against the law; and if I perish, I perish!" So Mordecai went his way and did according to all that Esther commanded him.

The story of the book of Esther occurs during the time of the Babylonian captivity after Persia had defeated Babylon and was now the major world power. The Persian king called Ahasuerus in the Bible and known to history as Cyrus had held a big banquet and celebration and demanded that his queen (probably better understood as the principal wife in his harem) come in to present herself to the king and his guests. She refused. She loses her position as principal wife, and the king goes through a selection process to replace her. Esther, an unmarried Jewish woman, is selected. The villain of this story is the king's second in command prince, Haman (we might call him prime minister). Esther's uncle, Mordecai, refused to pay homage to Haman. In Haman's anger at this he successfully has the king issue a ruling for all the Jews in the kingdom to be killed on a certain day. Mordecai tells Esther of this plan and asks her to intercede with the king on behalf of the Jews. Today's verses are Esther's response. The end of the story is: God saves the Jews.

I have heard pastors teach this book. They see Satan as the motivator working behind the scene on Haman to engineer this plot. Satan knows that Israel is God's chosen people. If Satan can cause the destruction of the Jews then God cannot fulfill His promises to Israel. If this happens, then Satan has proved his boast in Isa. 14:13-14 which includes Satan's claim, "I will be like the Most High."

We are often confused by examples of fasting in the Bible. Some people think that fasting is a way to get what they want from God. But nowhere does the Bible command people to fast. When the Bible mentions fasting, it is descriptive of what people did, but it is not prescriptive. Commands in the Bible are prescriptive in that God is prescribing certain things for us to do. There were no microwave ovens in ancient times, no frozen meals, no cans of food, no short cuts to meal preparation. Preparing meals was a laborious, time consuming activity. Fasting enabled people to forego normal routine activities in order to spend time praying, meditating and worshiping God. We are commanded to pray, meditate and worship God. But we are not commanded to fast.

Shushan was the capital of the Persian empire. God is not mentioned at all in the book of Esther. We do not know Esther or Mordecai's spiritual situation. They knew they were Jews. So they would have had some knowledge of the history of Israel. Those issues are not the point of the story. The point is that God miraculously delivered the Jews from Haman's hatred and plot. Satan was once again defeated as he had been often in the past and will be again many times.

The story of Esther is a demonstration of God's providence. God is in control of history. He is carrying out the plan for this world that He decreed in eternity past. He has made provision for me to fulfill everything He has commanded in His word. Whatever situation I face, it is not a surprise to God. He has made provision to carry me through it.



**Scissortailed Flycatcher, Lake Corpus Christi State Park, Texas**

Job 38:4-7. "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, When the morning stars sang together, And all the sons of God shouted for joy?"

The book of Job takes 42 chapters and 1,070 verses to give us one reason we can expect suffering in this world. I find reading the book laborious. Thirty-five of the chapters are an interchange between Job and his friends as to all the worldly ideas regarding suffering. I find it difficult to separate the truth from fiction. We will experience suffering because Satan rules this world.

In today's verses God is speaking and asking Job questions. I chose these verses to memorize because they give helpful information about God's creation. The "sons of God" are mentioned in Gen. 6:2 and Job 1:6. If these sons of God are angels as I have been taught, then angels existed before God created the heavens and the earth in Gen. 1:1. In fact, it may be that the initial creation of Gen. 1:1 was for the angels which is why they "shouted for joy." Then when Satan rebelled against God and led one-third of his buddies astray (Rev. 12:3-4), God judged the fallen angels and original creation. Then God made the world new for mankind. Who are the "morning stars"? Literally, they could be Mars and/or Venus. But do stars and planets sing? The "morning stars" could be a figurative reference to angels. Hebrew poetry is often written in this form. Hebrew poetry does not use meter and rhyming words like our poetry does. But states an idea then repeats it in a different way or sometimes in a contrasting way.

I have a Job commentary which probably came from my father's books. *Job's Victory* written by Walter W. Lee. Mr. Lee was a contemporary of my father. I knew him and three of his brothers. One brother was my father's attorney, another my father's investment partner, and the third a Baptist minister. Walter Lee was a long-time member of Second Baptist Church in Houston when it was still downtown. He wrote this 94 page book for the Sunday School class of professional businessmen he was teaching. I knew his daughter. She and her husband and my wife and I made the move from the Baptist churches in which we grew up to the same Bible church about the same time. Mr. Lee wrote:

> "God unfolds before Job the wonders of the universe and asks him whether he understands them, and whether he has entered into the secret of their origin and creation; and suggests that if not, he should not expect to understand the mystery of God's dealings with man."

> "When God has finished speaking, or before that time, Job had surrendered. 'Then Job answered the LORD, and said, behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand on my mouth.'" (Job 40:4-5).

> "The mystery of evil and of pain is no less of a mystery to us than it was to Job ... We cannot tell why we suffer."

> "The end of all these mysteries may be a good end, an end of mercy and grace. ... Job was simply invited to trust in the God whom he had found to be good, and to believe that God had the power out of evil itself to bring a greater good."

> "When once he (Job) had accepted the truth of God, that God was using him for His purpose, and that purpose was to make him perfect through obedience and suffering; when the sufferer was able to say in effect, 'Thy will be done,' the time of his sufferings was ended and the restoration of his happiness had begun."

>> Mr. Lee had good insight into the message of the book of Job. God allows us to suffer so that I can grow in my love for God and walk with Him, when I correctly apply God's word to the adversities.

Psa. 1:1-3. Blessed *is* the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.

In the Old Testament and particularly in the Psalms, there are frequent contrasts between a righteous person and an ungodly or wicked person. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* points out that "wicked" "may connote gross evil." They "are not in a covenant relationship with God; they live according to their passions. ... They may do kind and charitable deeds, but God's evaluation of them is that they are without eternal merit." It short, the "ungodly" or wicked are unbelievers, not believers.

In contrast, the blessed or happy man corresponds to a believer. There is a progression in the statements of Psa. 1:1. "Walks not in the counsel of the ungodly." From whom do we learn how to live our lives.? When we have difficulties or problems, to whom do we go for advice? Most of the psychologists and psychiatrists today are not trained from a Biblical standpoint. Their underlying assumption is that all people are inherently good. They don't understand that all of us are born as sinners. Since they approach people's problems with false assumptions, their advice is that of Satan and the world. For the people of Israel, their unbelieving neighbors were telling them to come worship their gods and idols like Baal, and you will be prosperous. Eventually, God pulled the trigger on Israel's idolatry and they went into captivity to Assyria and then to Babylon.

Today, we have our own false teachers. They claim to teach God's word, but they twist and distort. They allegorize it. We are in the twenty-first century. The Bible was written long ago. It doesn't have all the answers for today's issues. Have these teachers ever read 2 Pet. 2:3? "His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue." What does Psa. 1:2 say about this happy man? "But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night." Dr. Constable's *Notes* says that "meditation involves prolonged thinking about it that takes place in study and review throughout the day." This is a lot more than just reading your chapter for the day or reading a few verses in the morning before leaving for school or work. By memorizing Scripture I can recall verses and review them at any time.

I jumped ahead from the progression in the first verse. First, is listening to the advice or counsel of the ungodly. Next step reads "standing in the path of sinners. You begin to follow what they tell you. Finally, "sits in the seat of the scornful." Your friends, fellow employees, college professors who don't believe in God appear smart and intelligent. You listen to them and begin to doubt your own faith. What does Heb. 2:1 say? "Therefore we must give the most earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away." One tidbit of the world's thinking opens the door for another and then another. Each tidbit will take me farther from what God's word says.

The Old Testament Law which Israel was under was different from our walk by grace today. God promised Israel if they obeyed Him, he would bless them with good crops, i.e. material prosperity. That is the message of Psa. 1:3. Those who meditated and obeyed would be like "A tree planted by the rivers of water ... And whatever he does will prosper." They would prosper. God does not promise us material prosperity today. But He does offer us a potential carrot. This time for all eternity with the rewards we may receive at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Psa. 1:4-6. The ungodly *are* not so, But *are* like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish.

The contrast of the ungodly or wicked man with the righteous man blessed by God continues in the last half of this psalm. These terms are common in the Old Testament to contrast unbelievers with believers. God would give a promise to people and they would believe it. To Adam and Eve He promised a Seed who would bruise the head of the serpent. To Abraham He promised to make of him a great nation. Abraham believed God, leaving Ur of the Chaldeans to find the Promised Land. As Gen. 15:6 says "And Abraham believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." This final half of Psa. 1 describes the judgment and final end for believers and unbelievers.

Today we have the completed word of God. We have much fuller descriptions of the future judgments that will come. In Psa. 1:4 the ungodly unbelievers are said to be "like the chaff which the wind drives away." When a field of wheat is harvested, you have a lot of wheat seeds which look nothing like the flour my wife uses for baking. A wheat seed has a shell around the grain of wheat. The wheat is harvested and then it is threshed. Threshing is a process for braking the outer husk or shell from the grain. Then it can be thrown into the air and the wind blows the lighter husk or chaff away. The grain falls free, back into the bucket or shovel that was used to throw everything into the air. That is this ignorant city boy's explanation of what was involved. Today I am sure that our harvesting machines are designed to streamline the process. The chaff was considered worthless.

"The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment." The Psalm does not tell us what happens to them. Only that they will not remain afterwards "in the congregation of the righteous." Rev. 20:15 tells us. "Anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the Lake of Fire." This is the Great White Throne Judgment that occurs after the end of the Millennial Kingdom. An earlier judgment that occurs before the beginning of the Millennium will determine who will enter the Kingdom. In Matthew Jesus called this the judgment of the sheep and goats. The goats are set aside on the Judge's left hand. The Judge declares in Matt. 25:41: "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." One way we know that these are two different judgments is that in Revelation, the Devil and his angels have already been cast into the Lake of Fire. Whereas in Matthew, the everlasting fire has simply been prepared or made ready for Satan and his angels. In Matt. 25:34 the sheep on the Judge's right hand are said to "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Psa. 1:5 calls them the "congregation of the righteous."

"For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish." In John 5:22, Jesus said, "the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son." The Judge in all of these judgments is Jesus Christ. In John 5:30, Jesus describes His judgment repeating the truth of Psa. 1:6, "I can of Myself do nothing, As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me." Jesus, as God, is omniscient. He knows those who have believed in Him and possess His perfect righteousness.

In Psa. 1:2 the blessed or happy man, delights "in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night." Only as I learn, meditate and apply God's word, can I know what I need to know to handle every situation I face in life.

Psa. 2:1-5. Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*, "Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The LORD shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure:

This psalm is called a royal psalm in that it pictures the King of Israel. It is also called a Messianic psalm since God's appointed or anointed King in the psalm is understood as a prophetic reference to Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah. The psalm is quoted multiple times in the New Testament. I will discuss the psalm from the standpoint of what it tells us about the Messiah, and future prophecy.

"Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing?" In Acts 4 Peter and John were arrested by the Jewish leaders. When they were released, they quoted the Psa. 2:1-2 in Acts 4:25-26. The nations of the world think they do not need God in order to govern their people and build a prosperous economy and a great society. In today's idiom this "vain thing" is nothing but a "pipe dream." Hitler tried it in Germany. For over 100 years Russia has tried to do it following the principles of Marx and Lenin. The French Revolution tried it and France has been through multiple realigned governments. The United States has come closest with our Constitution built on a Biblical Judaeo-Christian framework. But as we continue to reject God and the Bible, our political leaders should read this psalm. God has allowed our nation's success because of the past faithfulness of our citizens to God and His word. Our nation is moving away from a Biblical way of thinking.

"The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel against the LORD and against His anointed." From the standpoint of prophecy, the "Anointed" is Jesus Christ. The Hebrew word translated, "Anointed" is the word that in Greek is transliterated as "Christ." Jesus will not reign as King until the Millennial Kingdom. This looks forward to the final rebellion when Satan is released from the Bottomless Pit and is finally defeated, (Rev. 20:7-9). What amazes me is that after Jesus' ruling for 1,000 years, Satan is still able to deceive the unbelievers and bring about this final rebellion against the reign of Israel's Messiah. Why are there unbelievers in the Millennium? The Millennium begins with two types of people. First, there are the resurrected martyred saints from the Tribulation and the raptured believers from the Church Age. Second, are the surviving sheep at the end of the Tribulation who enter the Millennium in physical bodies. This second group has children and multiply on the earth during the thousand years. Some of their children will believe in Jesus Christ, but others don't believe and are deceived by Satan for the final Gog and Magog War.

"He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The LORD shall hold them in derision." But God is immutable and cannot change. So God's laughing sounds like a figurative statement to show in human terms the foolishness of the thinking of the nations of the world who reject God. God knew from eternity past when He planned this world, what would happen. He made provision for every good decision and every bad decision I make, to work out and complete His plan.

So the psalmist adds in Psa. 2:5. "Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure." This reminds me of Prov. 16:23, "A man's heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps." God has the last word. I prefer to try to learn and know God's word, and then to obey it. I don't want to demonstrate how foolish I am by trying to show that I know better than God.

Psa. 2:6-9. "Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion." "I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.'"

This psalm has parallels with the reigning kings of Israel and particularly with David. But with all the New Testament quotations, it is certainly looking forward to the rule of Israel's Messiah, Jesus Christ. In God's plan for the prophesied Kingdom of Israel, the Messiah was to reign as King over all the nations of the world. His rule was to be from Zion (Jerusalem). "Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion."

"I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.'" Looking at the Davidic Covenant that God made with David in 2 Sam. 7:12-14: "When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom forever. ... I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be My son." When does this seed who will reign forever become God's son? *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* in agreement with other commentaries says that this king becomes God's son, not on the day of his birth, but on his coronation day. The principle is that kingship is hereditary, being passed down from father to son. Paul quoted Psa. 2:7 in his sermon in Acts 13:33. In Acts 13:32, he mentioned Jesus' resurrection. It appears that Jesus' Sonship establishing His right to rule as king occurred at the time God the Father resurrected Jesus. That was the day He was begotten based on Paul's sermon. Psa. 2:7 is also quoted in Heb. 1:5 which also says "He shall be to Me a Son" from 2 Sam. 7:14.

"I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for your possession." The Davidic Covenant of 2 Sam. 7 promised David that his dynasty would be everlasting. David was the King of Israel. His son Solomon succeeded him as king. David's line is traced in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 down to the humanity of Jesus. On the basis of the Davidic Covenant the resurrected Jesus Christ has the right to reign as king of Israel. But Psa. 2:8 expands the scope of His Kingdom. "I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for your possession." The Messiah's dominion includes the entire world. In the Millennium Christ will rule as king over all the world.

"You shall break them as a rod of Iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel." This is usually understood to show the destruction of the unbelievers and their nations in the final Armageddon War under the armies of the Antichrist and the False prophet of Rev. 16 by the return of Christ with His armies in Rev. 19:11-21. This verse is also quoted in Rev. 2:26-27, "He who overcomes and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels.'" Based on how we live our Christian lives, we can all expect to receive varying positions of responsibility in the Millennial Kingdom as we reign with Christ.

In Matt. 19:28, Jesus promised His disciples that they would "sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" in His future Kingdom. Several times the Old Testament prophets refer to David as ruling as king of Israel in the Messiah's kingdom. This is usually understood to be David's Seed, i.e. the Messiah. But Jesus is reigning over the entire world during the Millennium. Jer. 30:9 says God will raise up David to reign. This could be a chain of command: Christ, David, the disciples.

Psa. 2:10-12. Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, And rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish *in* the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed *are* all those who put their trust in Him.

Psa. 2:1 began, "Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing?" In Psa. 2:4, "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The LORD shall hold them in derision." In Psa. 2:6, "I have set My King On My Holy hill of Zion." Next: Psa. 2:8-9, "I will give *You* the Nations *for* Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth *for* your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel." With this certain future in mind, what does the psalmist tell us to do? "Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, And rejoice with trembling." Do I believe what God has said in His word? Then it should make a difference in how I live and think in this life.

For the unbelievers in this world, the invitation is to faith in God. On this passage, "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish *in* the way," Dr. J. Vernon McGee quotes his seminary professor on this verse saying this was an offer of salvation to the unbelieving kings, judges, and people of the world who needed to come to believe in Jesus Christ.

I know that as a believer, I will be returning with Jesus Christ as part of the armies of heaven of Rev. 19:14. I will see the sharp sword which goes out of Jesus Christ's mouth ("rod of iron"?) as He destroys the armies of the Antichrist and False Prophet. Before that happens I will have had to answer to Jesus Christ as to how well I have learned and applied God's word, Our pastor recently taught Eph. 4:1-3, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Phil. 2:12-16 has similar implications for the way I should live. "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain." In the last statement, Paul is saying that he conducts his ministry looking forward to the Judgment Seat of Christ. There are some important nuggets in these verses that I need to apply: 1) Walk worthy with 2) Lowliness, Gentleness (Humility); 3) Longsuffering (patient when others treat me poorly); 4) Bearing with one another in love; 5) Keeping the Unity of the Spirit; 6) Not Complaining; 7) Not Disputing; 8) Holding Fast the Word of Life (I need to know it first).

It is all too easy to just keep on keeping on with the daily grind of life. I need to utilize the privilege of my fellowship walk with God. I need a regular time in His word and in prayer. Applying God's word is a lot more than just keeping a few moral commandments, it is a whole new way of thinking that needs to guide my actions.

"Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him."  
Not only for salvation, but in my daily walk.



**Southern Tussock Moth, near Livingston, Texas**

Psa. 19:1-3. To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.>> The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. *There is* no speech nor language *Where* their voice is not heard.

As a point of interest which is not all that significant, the Hebrew text of Scripture includes the introductory identification of the psalmist and the recipient. "To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David." I grew up in the Baptist church thinking this was unimportant commentary. Since then, I have been taught that this is a part of inspired Scripture. David is identified as the writer of more of the psalms than any other person.

Theologians define two different kinds of revelation from God: "General Revelation" and "Special Revelation." General Revelation is what is known and available to every person in the world. Special Revelation is what God has revealed in His word, the Bible. I don't need the Bible to know and understand General Revelation. The subject of Psa. 19:1-3 is General Revelation. This is truth that everyone in the world knows from the time that they are aware of their surroundings. People that are mentally retarded or too young to understand may not yet understand General Revelation.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork." These are parallel statements expressing the same ideas in different words. This is a characteristic of Hebrew poetry. Hebrew poetry is not like our modern poetry where meter and the rhyming of words is important. Hebrew poetry is written around ideas. Sometimes the ideas are parallel and sometimes they speak of opposites or contrasts. There are also other variations. But rhyming and meter are not involved.

The word "firmament" is strange to us. We are not sure what a "firmament" is. I think of it as the atmosphere which surrounds the earth. Psa. 19:1 tells us that God created our entire universe. Gen. 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The New Testament gives us more information. John 1:1-3 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." God the Father or the Godhead together planned the creation of the world. Jesus Christ was the agent of creation. As Dr. J. Vernon McGee said referring to Gen. 1:2, "the Holy Spirit came in and refurbished and revamped it." Gen. 1:2 says "The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." Col. 1:16 confirms Jesus' work in creation. "For in Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him."

"Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. *There is* no speech nor language *Where* their voice is not heard." Paul spoke of General Revelation in Rom. 1:19-20. "Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse." David may have written this psalm because of the myths the unbelieving people around Israel were saying about how the world began. Today the world still follows myths. I prefer to get my answers from God's word. The science I learned in college was all laboratory based. We studied the principles in class and then demonstrated them in the labs. Try that with the big bang or make new life in a test tube!

Psa. 19:12-14. Who can understand *his* errors? Cleanse me from secret *faults*. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous *sins*; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.

Psa. 19:1-6 speaks of the glory of God's creation. Then in Psa. 19:7-8 David writes about "The law of the LORD," "The testimony of the LORD," "The statutes of the LORD," and "The commandment of the LORD." He is speaking of God's word. This psalm along with Psalms 1 and 119 are about God's word. "Who can understand *his* errors? Cleanse me from secret *faults*." Unless I know God's word, I cannot know what God's will for my life is. Knowing and applying God's word shapes the thinking of my mind, so I am not conformed to the false ideas the world propounds (Rom. 12:2).

In Psa. 19:13 David addresses a more serious problem. "Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous *sins*; Let them not have dominion over me." David recognized that sometimes he purposely committed willful sins. Psa. 51 is David's great confession psalm. In Psa. 51:3 he said, "For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin *is* always before me." He also talked about confession in Psa. 32:5, "I acknowledged my sin to you, And my iniquity I have not hidden." Even though David confessed his sin in Psa. 51 and God forgave him, he still experienced four rounds of divine discipline over a period of ten years. Willful and presumptuous sins are looking for trouble.

God gave us His word so we could learn how He wants us to live. In 1 Pet. 2:2 we are commanded, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." The psalmist in Psa. 119:11 wrote, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You." Neglecting to learn God's word is a willful sin in itself.

"Let them (presumptuous sins) not have dominion over me." God gave us the answer in Rom. 6:5. "Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." God has given us His word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Now we can overcome sin in our lives. When we sin, we have 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins (the known sins we have confessed) and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (unknown sins).

Psa. 19:11 has a warning and a carrot. "Moreover by them Your servant is warned, *And* in keeping them *there is* great reward." In the Old Testament God promised Israel that if they obeyed Him, he would bless them (materially). But if they disobeyed, He would curse them. Why did they not obey? Today, we have different marching orders. If we are faithful in our walk with the Lord, we can look forward to rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Jesus warns His disciples that the world would hate them. James 4:4 put it this way: "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer." Psa. 19:2-3 opened with the idea of speech, knowledge and language praising God's creation. This psalm concludes with the "words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart" praising God who redeems us from the penalty for our sins. My Savior is my Strength, my Rock, my Fortress from the evil of the world.

Psa. 23:1-6. A Psalm of David.>> The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You *are* with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.

This psalm depicts the love and care that Lord has for us during our entire life. "The LORD is my shepherd." Jesus called Himself the "Good Shepherd" in John 10:14, "I am the good shepherd, and I know My *sheep*, and am known by My own." Heb. 13:20-21 calls Jesus the "great Shepherd. "Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever."

"I shall not want." God provides all my needs. "He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters." The first things a sheep needs is grass to eat and water to drink. The shepherd provides it all. From a spiritual standpoint, God provides me with spiritual nourishment from His word and cleansing as Eph. 5:25-26 says, "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word."

"He restores my soul." For those who follow the Lord, there is forgiveness and peace. Phil. 4:6-7. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

"He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." In the Old Testament God gave Israel the law so they knew what they were supposed to do. Today, God gives us grace to learn His word. In that way we can transform our thinking to God's way. I need to respond in God's grace, learn His word so that I can walk in a manner well pleasing to Him. "For His name's sake." Think of this as being for His reputation.

"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You *are* with Me." I have faced many difficult challenges in my life and I know there are more to come. God has already provided for everything that comes up in my life. I need to prepare myself to meet them God's way.

"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over." God acts as our gracious host. God did so for David while his enemies watched and continued to plot how to get rid of him. (Like Saul, and then David's son, Absalom's rebellion.)

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever." Instead of "forever," the *NETBible* says, "I will live in the LORD's house for the rest of my life." David looked forward to a life of fellowship with God, so he wrote, "All the days of my life." Is my daily fellowship relationship with God the top priority of my life?



**Hermit Thrush, Houston, Texas**

Psa. 24:1-6. <<A Psalm of David.>> The earth *is* the LORD'S, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein. For He has founded it upon the seas, And established it upon the waters. Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive blessing from the LORD, And righteousness from the God of his salvation. This *is* Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him, Who seek Your face. Selah

The first two verses of this psalm look back to creation. "The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness. For He has founded it upon the seas, And established it upon the waters." God planned the world. Then He created it. Col. 1:16-17 says of Jesus Christ: "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in him all things consist" (all things are sustained). Heb. 1:3 adds that Jesus Christ is "upholding all things by the word of His power." This world continues to function as Jesus' power sustains it.

"Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place?" David wrote this psalm. Solomon's temple had not yet been built. David may have written the psalm in anticipation of a celebratory entry into Jerusalem. There has been speculation as to the specific event. But the Bible does not tell us. We can regard the "hill of the LORD" to be our entry into God's presence. This psalm is written to be sung by antiphonal choirs or voices. One choir or section of a choir sings a question "Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?" A second choir or section of the choir sings the answer.

"He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully." Perhaps the female voices in the choir sing the question and the male voices sing this answer." Not everyone will be able to stand in God's presence. As Psa. 1:5 said, "Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." In the future, we who have believed in Jesus Christ, having received the forgiveness of sins and Jesus' perfect righteousness will be in the congregation of the righteous who enter Messiah's kingdom. God considers our hands clean and our hearts pure.

"He shall receive blessing from the LORD, And righteousness from the God of his salvation." I checked several commentaries, and none discussed this receiving of righteousness. To me it sounds like what God said of Abraham in Gen. 15:6. "And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." Like Abraham, I believed. God imputed Jesus' righteousness to me.

"This *is* Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him, Who seek Your face." The people of Israel are those who are faithful to God in this verse. Unbelievers do not seek after God (Rom. 3:12).

While the commentators agreed that we could not be certain what event of entry into Jerusalem David had in mind, they also understood that there was a future promise built into this psalm. Every believer will be in Messiah's kingdom and then will spend eternity in the new heaven and new earth. For those believers who have grown in God's word and demonstrated personal righteousness in their lives, there is the potential of additional blessings.



Inca Dove, Lost Maples State Park, Texas

Psa. 24:7-10. Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who *is* this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, The LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He *is* the King of glory. Selah

David thought his conclusion to the psalm was important enough to repeat it twice. When does our victorious Lord enter into the gates of Jerusalem? This occurs after the Second Coming of Jesus when He defeats the armies of the Antichrist and False Prophet in Rev. 19:11-21. If my understanding is correct, "the King of glory shall come in" to Jerusalem. "The LORD strong and mighty, The LORD mighty in battle." He enters Jerusalem to begin His one thousand year reign over all the nations of the world. This is the fulfillment of the promised Kingdom for Israel and begins the time we know as the Millennium. "Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts (armies), He is the King of glory."

Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum writes a detailed description of events surrounding Jesus' Second Coming in his *Messianic Bible Study Collection*, Volumes 3 and 4. He weaves together passages of Scripture from all over the Bible into a chronological summary. I will give a broad outline of what he wrote.

- 1) Jesus returns to the air and believers in the Church Age are caught up to meet Him in the Rapture.
- 2) Satan knows that the countdown has begun before his judgment is executed. He must destroy Israel to prove that God is wrong and that Satan can rule the world better than God.
- 3) The Antichrist is revealed and establishes himself as a worldwide dictator over a confederation of ten nations. The Antichrist enters into a treaty with Israel for seven years. The clock is now ticking for Daniel's seventieth week. The Antichrist's capital city is Babylon.
- 4) After three and one half years the Antichrist sets himself up in the Jerusalem temple to be worshiped as a god. When this happens, the believers in Jerusalem are told to get out of Dodge and flee to Petra. Dan. 11:41 says that three nations are protected from the Antichrist at this time: Edom, Moab, and Ammon. Petra is located in the area of these three former nations.
- 5) In Rev. 16-18 Babylon is destroyed by armies, which Dr. Fruchtenbaum says are made up of Gentile believers.
- 6) Satan is out to get the Jews and Antichrist is under Satan's control. Antichrist musters his armies to attack Jerusalem (Zech. 10:4-9 Mic. 4:9-5:1).
- 7) The Antichrist now moves against the Jews in Petra (Bozrah). Jer. 49:13-14.
- 8) Dr. Fruchtenbaum names four Old Testament prophecies where Jesus returns to protect the Jews in Bozrah (Petra) from the attack of the Antichrist.
- 9) Then Jesus destroys the rest of the Antichrist's armies at Armageddon.

Dr. Fruchtenbaum covers this in thirty-four pages. He is a fantastic Bible teacher. Some of this above is new to me. I won't be in this world when these events of the Tribulation happen. But I will be in the armies from heaven that return with Christ at His Second Coming. Rev. 19:14 says we will be riding on white horses. But the only weapon mentioned is the sharp sword in Jesus' mouth which Psa. 2 calls a "rod of iron." Dr. Fruchtenbaum may not have understood all this correctly, but I do agree that Jesus will destroy the armies of the world at His Second Coming. He will then be qualified to make His celebratory entry into Jerusalem described in Psa. 24. Why bother with all this? The Bible talks about real people and real events. It gives us a panorama of God's plan and purpose. As all this unfolds, God is glorified. May I live my life in a manner that glorifies God.

Psa. 33:6-9. By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deep in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was *done*; He commanded, and it stood fast.

This passage tells us a lot about God. "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth." This verse is looking at Creation. Creation speaks of God's omnipotence. God created this world out of nothing. Gen. 1:1 tells us, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." But God did not have a beginning. God is eternal. God's eternity is an attribute we cannot fully understand. Everything we know anything about always has a beginning. If God had a beginning, then who created God? This takes us back to God's word. Several times the Bible says that God is "from everlasting." Psa. 41:13, "Blessed *be* the LORD God of Israel From everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen." God has always existed.

The word "host" translates the Hebrew word that is often used of armies. So what is the "army" of "the heavens." To me that sounds like the stars. Gen. 1:14, "Then God said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years.'" Isa. 45:12 is similar. "I have made the earth, And created man on it. I—My hands—stretched out the heavens, And all their host I commanded." There are other passages in the Old Testament that use this "stretched out" language. This may provide an answer to the quandary we face with Creation Week occurring 6,000-8,000 years ago, yet we have stars that are billions of light years away whose light we see now on earth. God spoke, creating stars near the earth and then instantaneously stretched them out to their places in the universe. This is the explanation put forth in 1994 by Dr. Russell Humphries in his book, *Starlight and Time*. Then in 2007 Dr. John Hartnett give us more insight in *Starlight, Time and the New Physics*.

"He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deep in storehouses." On the third day, Gen. 1:9, "God said, 'Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry *land* appear.'"

Then the psalmist tells us what we should do. "Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him" I am a creation of God. I should honor Him in all that I do. My life should bring glory to God.

Psa. 33:9 speaks of the sovereignty of God. "For He spoke, and it was *done*; He commanded, and it stood fast." Every physical thing God created in this world obeys God's rules, except for people. God created us in His own image. He gave us the freedom to choose to obey Him or to do things our own way. God has given me His word, so that I can know His truth and how He wants me to think and to live. My responsibility is to fear Him and to stand in awe of Him.



**Indigo Bunting, Quintana Neotropical Preserve, Texas**

Psa. 34:11-15. Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Who *is* the man *who* desires life, And loves *many* days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, And your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of the LORD *are* on the righteous, And His ears *are open* to their cry.

This is another psalm written by David. In these verses he speaks as a father would to his children. "Listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD." When I recognize just who God is and what He has done, I should have the utmost respect for Him. But in that respect is also fear because God is a God of justice. I will face God's judgment in the future at the Judgment Seat of Christ. For unbelievers, there will be the Great White Throne Judgment where their works will be judged and found not to measure up to the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. Therefore, unbelievers must be taught to believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and eternal life.

"Who *is* the man *who* desires life, And loves *many* days, that he may see good?" The Old Testament law under which Israel lived is different from the dispensation of grace in which we live today. Israel's obedience to the Law contained a promise of a long and productive life. Paul quoted the fifth of the Ten Commandments in Eph. 6:2-3: "'Honor your father and mother,' which is the first commandment with promise: 'that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.'" Deut. 5:33 also included the long life promise: "You shall walk in the ways which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live and that *it may be* well with you, and *that* you may prolong *your* days in the land which you shall possess." What does David say must be done for a long life?

"Keep your tongue from evil, And your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it." Consider these commands that James gives us. James 4:11: "Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law." James 5:9: "Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned." Believers commit a lot of sins verbally. We can stir up a lot of trouble by what we say. Speaking evil, telling lies, grumbling and complaining is not the way to pursue peace with other people. Sins of the tongue include gossip, lying, telling other people all the bad things that someone has done or said to you. I need to be more careful in the things I speak about or say to other people.

Prov. 26:18-28 covers many of the sins of the tongue. Verse 20: "Where *there is* no wood, the fire goes out; And where *there is* no talebearer, strife ceases." Verse 22: "The words of a talebearer *are* like tasty trifles, And they go down into the inmost body." Verse 24: "He who hates, disguises *it* with his lips, And lays up deceit within himself." Verse 28: "A lying tongue hates *those who are* crushed by it, And a flattering mouth works ruin." Verse 19, what kind of excuse is this, "I was only joking!"

"The eyes of the LORD *are* on the righteous, And His ears *are open* to their cry." This prayer promise is as true today as it was three thousand years ago when a lot of the psalms were written. Psa. 66:18: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear." Isaiah prophesied in a less familiar verse, Isa. 59:2, "Your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden *His* face from you, So that He will not hear." If I have unconfessed sin in my life, my fellowship relationship with God is broken. These verses tell me that God will not hear my prayers. 1 John 1:9 gives the solution. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Psa. 34:19-22. Many *are* the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all. He guards all his bones; Not one of them is broken. Evil shall slay the wicked, And those who hate the righteous shall be condemned. The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, And none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned.

"Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all." While under the Old Testament law God promised blessing and prosperity to Israel if the nation as a whole obeyed the law and did not turn to the idolatrous worship of the neighboring Canaanites, there were times when righteous people did suffer affliction. God promises to provide for them and to deliver them through their sufferings. 1 Cor. 10:13 is a similar promise to us today when we undergo testing. "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*." I have the complete word of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit to guide me through every test I may face.

"He guards all his bones; Not one of them is broken." Writing about Jesus' crucifixion John quoted this verse in John 19:36, "For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, '*Not* one of His bones shall be broken.'" The psalmist is giving an example of God's deliverance. Putting these two verses together, righteous Jesus was crucified. When it became time for the Roman soldiers to break Jesus' bones, He had already died. Then on the third day God delivered Jesus, raising Him from death back to life.

"Evil shall slay the wicked." Unbelievers do not have the same protections and deliverances by God that believers have. They may fight and battle among themselves, destroying each other. "Those who hate the righteous shall be condemned." There will be a day of reckoning for unbelievers. The day of judgment is coming.

"The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, And none of those who trust in

Him shall be condemned." Christ's death paid the penalty for my sins. In contrast to the condemnation of unbelievers John 3:18 says, "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."



LeConte's Sparrow, John Paul Landing Park, Houston, Texas

Psa. 37:1-5. <<A Psalm of David.>> Do not fret because of evildoers, Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, And wither as the green herb. Trust in the LORD, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring *it* to pass.

"Do not fret because of evildoers, Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity." Are my eyes on the Lord, or do I envy the successes and prosperity of the unbelievers around me? Paul wrote of Jesus Christ in Col. 1:8, "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence." I need to put obeying and pleasing Christ as the top priority in my life.

"For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, And wither as the green herb." There is a future judgment coming. But it will happen when God decides to let it happen. As 2 Pet. 3:10 says, "The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." God's timing is perfect.

"Trust in the LORD, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness." For David and the people of Israel, doing good, would be obeying the Old Testament law. But this came only as they exercised "Trust in the LORD." They also had to walk by faith. The Old Testament law held the promise that if Israel was faithful to God and did not go after idols, He would bless them. God would faithfully feed them, putting food on the table for them. "Dwell in the land." This was a command to Israel. God gave them the promised land. But there were times when they left the promised land, rather than waiting for the Lord to deliver them from tough times. In our daily Bible reading, my wife and I have just finished reading Jeremiah. Jeremiah 44 describes a time after Babylon had first conquered Judah and Jerusalem and carried most of the people into captivity. There was a remnant left in the land. But this remnant also had not listened to Jeremiah and were set on going to Egypt. Jeremiah warned them in Jer. 44:11-12, "Behold I will set my face against you for catastrophe and for cutting off all Judah. And I will take the remnant of Judah who have set their faces to go into the land of Egypt to dwell there, and they shall all be consumed *and* fall in Egypt. They shall be consumed by the sword and by famine; and they shall be an oath, an astonishment, a curse and a reproach!" This happened when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Egypt. He also returned to completely destroy Jerusalem. God allowed this because the people of Judah were still worshiping idols and not the Lord.

"Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring *it* to pass." A person delighting himself in the Lord will have righteous desires. The people of Israel were often led astray by their neighbors saying the way to prosperity was to worship idols. We don't have the same kinds of idols today, but the world has its own way of thinking that leaves God out. Paul warns the Colossians in Col. 2:8, "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ." Too many churches put too much weight on the traditions of the fathers, rather than God's word. The basic principles of the world completely leave God out of the picture. I want to focus on God's word and what Christ wants me to do. I don't want to buy into the world's ideals, no matter how good they sound.

Psa. 37:21-24. The wicked borrows and does not repay, But the righteous shows mercy and gives. For *those* blessed by Him shall inherit the earth, But *those* cursed by Him shall be cut off. The steps of a *good* man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the LORD upholds *him* with His hand.

Having been involved in lending and investing all my life, I found Psa. 37:21 apropos. David is contrasting unbelievers, whom he identifies here as the "wicked," "enemies of the LORD" (verse 20), and "the transgressors" (verse 38) with believers whom he calls "the righteous." Psa. 37:1 began, "Do not fret because of evildoers, Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity." In the Old Testament unbelievers were those who did not obey the law God gave to Moses. They are contrasted throughout this psalm with believers who are called "the righteous," "those who wait on the LORD" (verse 9), "the meek" (verse 11), "the upright" (verse 18), "a *good* man" (verse 23), "His saints" (verse 28), and "the blameless *man*" (verse 37). "The wicked borrows and does not repay." This does not say that we should not borrow. But when we do borrow, we should repay the money borrowed in accordance with our agreement. Payments should be made when due.

The contrast to the unbelieving borrowers who do not pay their debts is the righteous believer whom the Lord has blessed. Rather than borrowing the righteous "shows mercy and gives." As the Lord provides for His righteous believers they are able to give and help others in need. The righteous believer also will use wisdom in the ways he uses God's provision. Our society is driven by the desire to have the latest and the best. We must keep up with the newest fashions in our clothes. We must have the most advanced electronic gadgets. We constantly look for more exciting ways to entertain ourselves. To cater to these desires, we spend money. We often run up the balances on our credit cards. Rather than exercising the Joseph principle of saving and investing out of every paycheck, we spend the entire paycheck and sometimes more. Paying interest on a credit card increases my cost of living.

"For *those* blessed by Him shall inherit the earth." The word translated "earth" is not an incorrect translation. But it has a different meaning to us from what it meant to David when he wrote this. The word can also be translated as "land." This is a reference to the "land" God promised to Israel. It looks forward to the kingdom of the Messiah that will be the possession of the believers in Israel. Unbelievers will be "cursed by Him and shall be cut off." They will be cut off from the kingdom.

"The steps of a *good* man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way." Some translations capitalize the pronoun "He" as a reference to the "LORD." Others do not, referring back to "the *good* man." Since the "he" pronouns in Psa. 37:24 are not capitalized, I think it is probably better to think that it is the good man who delights in walking according to God's way. But I also would like to see the Lord delighting in my walk with Him. Are my steps ordered by the Lord? Do I get my marching orders from God's word, or do I follow the desires of my flesh? The Lord may also order my steps in another way. Prov. 16:9, "A man's heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps." Many times the Lord seems to have thwarted my best chosen ideas, and sent me off in a better direction.

"Though he (the good man) fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the LORD upholds *him* with His hand." When I am walking with the Lord, I can know that even in the worst of calamities, God has made provision for me. But when I am not walking according to God's word, the calamity may be divine discipline to get my priority turned back to God.

Psa. 50:10-15. For every beast of the forest *is* Mine, *And* the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains, And the wild beasts of the field *are* Mine. "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world *is* Mine, and all its fullness. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, Or drink the blood of goats? Offer to God thanksgiving, And pay your vows to the Most High. Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me."

In the ancient world the sacrifices to idols was done with the idea that the gods represented by the idols need food to sustain themselves. Under the law God gave to Moses the sacrifices were to provide a visual image of the seriousness of sin and the future death of the Messiah to pay the penalty for our sins. This psalm is a rebuke to Israel for going through the ritualistic motions of the sacrifices. But the sacrifices were not being made in a way of worship to God. In Psa. 50:7 the psalmist has to remind the people who God is. "Hear, O My people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you; I *am* God, your God." At the end of this psalm it says in Psa. 50:22-23, "Now consider this, you who forget God, Lest I tear *you* in pieces, And *there be* none to deliver: Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; And to him who orders *his* conduct *aright* I will show the salvation of God." I should be offering genuine praise to God, not ritualistically repeating words that have no meaning to me. My conduct needs to conform to the commands of God's word.

"If I were hungry." God is speaking. He is not hungry. He is not like the false gods behind the idols of the world. "The world *is* mine, and all its fullness." God created this world. It is His. He can create another world if He decides to do so.

"Offer to God thanksgiving. And pay your vows to the Most High." God says in Psa. 50:8, "I will not rebuke you for your sacrifices Or your burnt offerings." But at the same time God expected the people to thank God and to realize who God is to whom they were offering these sacrifices.

"Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me." Every one will face many troubles throughout his life. Do I do as 1 Pet. 5:6-7 say? We usually quote verse 7 only. But the main command is in verse 6: "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him for He cares for you." God commands me to humble myself. When trouble comes along, do I do everything I can to solve the problem? Then when nothing works, is that when I call to God for help? Or do I cast all my care on Him when the trouble begins and watch how God solves the problems?

The worship of God can be done in many ways. Worship is more than just singing hymns and choruses. We worship God when we pray, when we give to the Lord's work, when we hear the teaching of God's word, and even the reading of Scripture. We also worship when we obey and apply God's word in our daily walk. The more I know about God, the better I can worship and glorify Him. When I sing, am I just repeating words or do I think about what they mean? Do they reflect accurately what the Bible says, or do they reflect the traditions of men and the world? I don't want to do what this psalm warns the people of Israel not to do, to go through the motions of the sacrifices or of worship, but forget God. We can go to church, sing the hymns and choruses, but completely forget God in the process. Does the music remind me of God or of the "top forty" popular music on radio, television or from your mobile phone?



**Eastern Meadowlark, Galveston Island State Park, Texas**

Psa. 66:18-20. If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear. *But* certainly God has heard *me*; He has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed *be* God, Who has not turned away my prayer, Nor His mercy from me!

"If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear." This is a short and an important verse on prayer. It is easy to memorize: twelve words, sixteen syllables. The principle in this verse is repeated several times in the Bible. Prov. 28:9, "One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, Even his prayer *is* an abomination." I take it that turning your ear away from hearing the law means that you have rejected the teaching of God's word. This is when I decide to do things my way, and not to do as God tells me in His word. Of course, if I don't even hear the word taught, the result would be the same. I can't apply God's word if I never hear it, so I can learn and apply it. A few verses later in Prov. 28:13, it says, "He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes *them* will have mercy." John did not come up with 1 John 1:9 out of thin air. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Isaiah wrote in Isa. 59:2, "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden *His* face from you, So that He will not hear."

Jesus told His disciples in John 15:7, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you." Abiding in Christ does not describe every believer in Jesus Christ. This is the believer who is walking in fellowship with God. He does not regard iniquity in his life. As Solomon tells us in Proverbs and John repeated, the abiding believer is the one who has confessed his sins and forsaken them.

The psalmist concludes this psalm with praise to God. "Certainly God has heard *me*; He has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed *be* God, Who has not turned away my prayer, Nor His mercy from me!"

I have heard a pastor use the acronym CATS to describe a structure or content for prayer. C is for Confession. We confess our known sins to God so that we do not get caught in the Psa. 66:18 trap where God will not hear our prayers. Of course, public prayer is not the place to confess our personal sins. So this would be for private prayer or what we would do silently before we begin to pray publicly. A is for Adoration or praise to God for whom He is. Jude 25 finishes his book with this praise: "To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, *Be* glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen." We praise God for His omnipotence which enabled Him to create the world. Now we can give thanks to Him for His Creation. T is for Thanksgiving. This is praise to God for what He has done. S is for Supplication. These are our requests for ourselves and also our intercessory requests for others. Phil. 4:6 speaks of both thanksgiving and supplication. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."

When I was in college, a fellow student told me that when he received a prayer request for a person. He stops right there and prays for that request. He doesn't depend on his memory to remind him later when he is praying for other matters. When someone mentions a need or a prayer request, we can respond, "I will pray for you." Why not ask, "Can I pray for you now?" Then when they say "yes," you can pray for them. My wife and I do a lot of "bullet prayers," to cover immediate issues, as well as a longer regular prayer time together.

Psa. 86:5-7. For You, Lord, *are* good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You. Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; And attend to the voice of my supplications. In the day of my trouble I will call upon You, For You will answer me.

The superscription of this psalm says it is a "prayer of David." Psa. 86:2 gives us an idea of the seriousness of David's situation. "Preserve my life, for I *am* holy; You are my God; Save your servant who trusts in You!" David is praying that his life be preserved. Psa. 86:14 also tells us of David's current situation. "'O God, the proud have risen against me, And a mob of violent *men* have sought my life, And have not set You before them."

When King Saul disobeyed God, Samuel told Saul that God would remove the kingdom from Saul and his family. Then under God's direction Samuel anointed David to be the king to replace Saul. Saul decided to get rid of David. David had to flee for his life. Later, after Saul died and David became king, David also sinned in his affair with Bathsheba. David went through ten years of divine discipline which included his son Absalom's rebellion. Either one of these situations, as well as others, could be the circumstances about which David is praying.

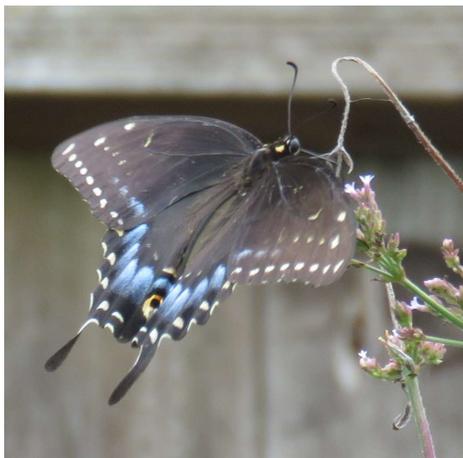
"For You, Lord, *are* good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You." David is praising God for His character by calling Him "good." God is also "ready to forgive, And abundant in mercy to all those who call upon Him."

Psa. 86:6 gives David's prayer request. "Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; And attend to the voice of my supplications." In verses 3 and 13 David also prays that God would be merciful to him.

Verse 6 is also bracketed or book-ended by the phrase "call upon You." God is "abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You." Then in Verse 8 David prays, "In the day of my trouble I will call upon you." The two mentions of "Call upon You" point to David's request between them that God would hear his prayer and attend to the voice of his supplications.

"David expresses his faith, "For You will answer me." God has had him anointed as king. God had also made a covenant with David in 2 Sam. 7:12, "When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom." David knew God would fulfill these promises. So in verse 2 David acknowledges to God that he trusts in Him. David also prays in Psa. 86:11, "Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name."

This psalm is a wonderful example of how I should pray when I am going through a time of hardship and trials. Am I trusting in the Lord to provide for me through the problems. Do I need to pray that He would teach me His way out of the difficulties. David also included the outlook of prophecy in this psalm. Psa. 86:8, "All nations whom You have made Shall come and worship before You, O Lord, And shall glorify Your name." Is God's glory the goal of my life?



**Black Swallowtail, butterfly, Baytown, Texas**

Psa. 100:1-5. <<A Psalm of Thanksgiving.>> Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands! Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before His presence with singing. Know that the LORD, He *is* God; *It is* He *who* has made us, and not we ourselves; *We are* His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, *And* into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, *and* bless His name. For the LORD *is* good; His mercy *is* everlasting, And His truth *endures* to all generations.

The superscription to this psalm describes its contents well. This is a psalm of praise and thanksgiving. "Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands!" God is asking that everyone shout joyfully to Him. The day is coming when this will happen. Everyone, believers and unbelievers, will acknowledge that the Lord is God. In Matt. 23:37-39 Jesus expressed sorrow for Israel for the suffering that was coming to them because the nation had rejected Jesus as their Messiah. In Matt. 23:39 Jesus prophesied, "for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD!'" The time is coming when all Israel will shout this to God, and then they will see the Second Coming of Christ.

When we go to church to worship God, do we do it with joy, gladness and singing? Are we thinking about getting back home to watch the latest sporting event on TV? Are we worried about all the things that went wrong the prior week or how we will do all the things next week that need doing? "Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before His presence with singing."

Know that the LORD (Jehovah), He is God. "Jehovah" is the name by which Israel knew God. The name distinguished God for the people of Israel from all the false gods their neighbors worshiped.

"*It is* He *who* has made us, and not we ourselves." God created this world out of nothing. All the myths of the ancient world failed to explain how anything could have come into existence. Just as today, the Big Bang and evolution fail to explain how energy and matter came to exist in the first place. "*We are* His people and the sheep of His pasture." God created us and we belong to Him. He has placed us in this world which the psalmist describes as God's pasture. We feed in God's pasture.

"Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, *And* into His courts with praise." This is a reference to the tabernacle or the temple where Israel worshiped. This is the way we should worship God in church, with thanksgiving and praise. As Col. 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

"For the LORD *is* good." We worship a righteous God. "His mercy *is* everlasting." In God's mercy He sent Jesus Christ to die as our substitute so we can receive the gift of eternal salvation. Because Christ died for our sins, God is just in forgiving us and giving us the righteousness of Jesus Christ. God's mercy is a reflection of God's love. "Everlasting." God is eternal and immutable (unchanging). "His truth *endures* to all generations." Our God is a God of truth. "All generations" is another reference to God's eternity.

God is worthy of my praise. This psalm speaks of several of God's eternal and infinite attributes: His love, His eternity, His immutability, His truth, His righteousness, His justice, His omnipotence.



**Snowy Egret, Fulshear, Texas**

Psa. 106:1-3. Praise the LORD! Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is good!* For His mercy *endures* forever. Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? Who can declare all His praise? Blessed *are* those who keep justice, *And* he who does righteousness at all times!

This psalm begins with praise and thanksgiving to God. "Praise the LORD! Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is good!* For His mercy *endures* forever." This opening verse recalls three of God's attributes: His righteousness, "*He is good*"; love "His mercy"; and God is eternal, "forever."

"Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? Who can declare all His praise?" The questions expect a negative answer. God's mighty acts are greater than we know. So how can I express them? There is no way I can praise God enough for what He has done.

Beginning in Psa. 106:6, the psalmist follows up recalling the history of Israel from their time in Egypt through the exodus and into the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. This history reveals God's love and mercy on Israel. But the history also shows Israel's sins and unfaithfulness to God.

"Blessed *are* those who keep justice. *And* he who does righteousness at all times!" How should I live? God gave the Law to Israel through Moses so they would know how they ought to live. They did not follow the Law. They listened to their idolatrous neighbors and worshiped the same idols their neighbors worshiped. Today we who believe in Jesus Christ are not under the Old Testament Law. But God still expects us to exercise justice with one another and to live righteously. We have the full revelation of God in the Bible. As 2 Pet. 1:3-4 says, God's "divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust." God expects me to learn His word and to do it.



**Baltimore Oriole, Quintana, Texas**

Psa. 107:1-3. Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is good!* For His mercy *endures* forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy, And gathered out of the lands, From the east and from the west, From the north and from the south.

Psalm 107 is the third psalm of a trilogy of praise and thanksgiving to God including Psa. 105 and Psa. 106. These psalms recount historical events that happened to Israel and praise God for His mercy and preservation. Psa. 106 had Israel still in captivity in Babylon.

Psa. 107:11 says "Because they rebelled against the words of God, And despised the counsel of the Most High." I don't want to follow this bad example that Israel set. They rebelled or disobeyed God's word and ended up with seventy years of captivity in Babylon.

But they turned themselves around. Psa. 107:13-14, "Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, *And* He saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, And broke their chains in pieces."

So it sounds like Psalm 107 is written after Israel has returned from captivity during the time of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi. Now God wants them to "Give thanks to the LORD, for *He is good!* For His mercy *endures* forever."

Second, God expects us to "Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy." Jesus Christ died on the cross to redeem us from the slave market of sin. I am responsible to tell others about what God has done for me.

God "has gathered (Israel) out of the lands, From the east and from the west, From the north and from the south." Babylon was located to the north and then to the east of the land of Israel. Psa. 107:3 may have a future regathering of Israel in view also. This would be when Israel is regathered to the land. This sounds like what Isaiah said in Isa. 11:11, "It shall come to pass in that day *That* the Lord shall set His hand again the second time To recover the remnant of His people who are left, From Assyria and Egypt, From Pathros and Cush, From Elam and Shinar, From Hamath and the islands of the sea." We like to think that this second regathering is taking place now where almost half the Jewish people in the world are now living in Israel. But this second regathering does not have to happen prior to the Rapture of the Church. This second regathering may not happen until after the Rapture. So while the Rapture could occur today in the next few moments, it could be still far in the future. There are still Jews dispersed throughout the four corners of the earth (Isa. 11:12).

For me today, I need to live my life as God's word tells me, in anticipation that Jesus could appear in the air and I will be caught up into the clouds to meet Him at any moment.



Carolina Satyr, butterfly, Crosby, Texas

Psa. 110:1-4. <<A Psalm of David.>> The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Your people *shall be* volunteers In the day of Your power; In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth. The LORD has sworn And will not relent, "You *are* a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek."

This is the most quoted psalm in the New Testament with one count coming to thirty-three references. Jesus, Himself, quoted Psa. 110:1 when He asked the Pharisees a question in Matt. 22:42-45, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" They said to Him, 'The Son of David.' He said to them, 'How then does David in the Spirit call Him "Lord," saying: "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool'"? If David then calls Him 'Lord.' how is He his son?"

In verse 1 Yahweh, God the Father, speaks "to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" This tells us where Jesus is right now. He is sitting at the right hand of God the Father. Jesus is not now sitting on His throne because this psalm says, "Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." At this time Satan is still the ruler of this world.

"The LORD will send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!" The time is coming when Jesus will return at His Second Coming. Satan will be removed as the ruler of this world, and Jesus Christ will take His place as the King over the entire world.

"Your people *shall be* volunteers In the day of Your power." We, as believers in Jesus Christ, will return with Him as volunteers in His army to see Him destroy the armies of the Antichrist. I say we return with Him because previously we will have been caught up in the Rapture and will have been in heaven for at least seven years.

"The LORD has sworn And will not relent, 'You *are* a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.'" Melchizedek is that mysterious king of Salem and a priest of God who met Abraham after Abraham had won a great battle. Abraham paid a tithe of the spoils of the battle to Melchizedek. The book of Hebrews quotes this psalm to describe Christ as being our high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. The point in Hebrews is we don't know who Melchizedek was, where he came from or what happened to him. Like Melchizedek, Christ will rule as king and also serve as our high priest. Christ's role as High Priest will be forever. In contrast, Israel's priests were all descendants of Aaron and only served during their lifetimes..

Christ is our high priest. But we also serve as our own priest before God. We do not need another human mediary to approach God on our behalf. 1 Pet. 2:5 says, "you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." 1 Pet. 2:9 adds, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." As Rom. 12:1 says, I am to present my body (my entire self) "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service."



Queen, butterfly, Brownsville, Texas

Psa. 110:5-7. The Lord *is* at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill *the places* with dead bodies, He shall execute the heads of many countries. He shall drink of the brook by the wayside; Therefore He shall lift up the head.

"The Lord *is* at Your right hand." David again sees the Messiah sitting at the right hand of God the Father. This is where Jesus is today, sitting with the Father on His throne. Jesus is not yet ruling as king.

"He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill *the places* with dead bodies, He shall execute the heads of many countries." In writing this psalm David did not foresee that there would be an interval of time between the Messiah sitting at God's right hand and His execution of judgment when He comes to establish the kingdom God promised to David. Today, we understand from additional prophecies that "the day of His wrath" refers to Jesus' Second Coming. Consider these verses that describe what will happen.

- > Joel 3:2. "I will also gather all nations, And bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; And I will enter into judgment with them there On account of My people, My heritage Israel, Whom they have scattered among the nations; They have also divided up My land."
- > Zech. 14:4. "And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west, *Making* a very large valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the north And half of it toward the south."
- > Rev. 16:16. "And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon."
- > Rev. 19:14-15. "And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."
- > Psa. 2:9 describes this event. "You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel."

Jesus returns in His Second Coming at the end of the seven year Tribulation with us, the Raptured believers of the Church Age serving as volunteers in the "armies of heaven." This is followed by the Sheep and Goats Judgment of Matt. 25:31-46. Satan is bound for 1,000 years in the Bottomless Pit (Rev. 20:1-3). Christ as Messiah, takes His place as king ruling the earth for the 1,000 year Millennium of Rev. 20:4-6.

Psa. 110:7 ends this psalm with a strange statement. "He shall drink of the brook by the wayside; Therefore He shall lift up the head." Dr. J. Vernon McGee draws a parallel between drinking "of the brook by the wayside," and the account of Gideon's selection of the three hundred men whom he led into battle against the Midianites in Jud. 7:6. Gideon started with an army of more than 32,000 troops, but the Lord told him that that was too many. After a couple of cuts, Gideon ended up with 300 men who drank water by scooping it up in their hands and lapping it like a dog. The others got down on their knees to drink. Jesus returns and in His humanity "shall drink water of the brook by the wayside." While doing that He remains alert to danger, by lifting "up His head." At least, that is what I see happening in this verse. If anyone has a different idea, let me know.

Psa. 110 is a good example of why God gives us prophecy. Prophecy is an encouragement to me. I know that no matter what happens, God is in control. He is working out His plan.

Psa. 119:9-11. How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You!

The subject of the 176 verses of Psa. 119 is God's word. Psa. 119:9 and Psa. 119:11 are two verses that I memorized when as a teenager I was using The Navigators, Topical Memory System. These verses are not complicated. Knowing and obeying God's word is what God wants me to do.

Rom. 3:23 tells us what every person is like. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We are all born into this world as sinners. Christ died on the cross in my place and paid the penalty for my sins. John 3:15 (*sic*) says "Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." John 3:18-19 warns about what happens to those who do not trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and eternal life. "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but He who does not believe is condemned already, because He has not believed in the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." Each person has a choice, to believe or to reject Jesus Christ's gift.

Now that I have believed in Jesus Christ and have received the forgiveness of my sins and eternal life, I need to live like it. As Paul wrote in Phil. 1:27, "Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." This is what Psa. 119 is talking about. If I want to "cleanse my way," I need to learn God's word and apply it.

"With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from your commandments." The word "heart" has different connotations to us today. As the Bible uses the word, this is the innermost part of people. It is what and how we think and do. The psalmist prays, "Let me not wander from Your commandments." This is a good prayer for me to remember and to pray.

"Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against you." The Navigators included this verse in their initial memory verse pack. Memorizing Bible verses is a figurative way to hide God's word in our hearts and minds. But I don't want to hide it in the sense that it is buried and forgotten. Dr. J. Vernon McGee comments on this verse: "I think he (the psalmist) meant, 'to obey it.' That is the important thing. It is a wonderful thing to be able to stand up and by rote recite verse after verse ... but we also need to *obey* the Word. That is what the psalmist meant by hiding it in your heart."



American Oystercatcher, Texas City, Texas

Rom. 6:1-4. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" When I believed in Jesus Christ, I did so without any good works on my part. My salvation is entirely the work of God. God deposited to my heavenly account Jesus' perfect righteousness. So Paul asks this question and answers emphatically, "No." Everyone agrees that Paul is now writing about how I as a believer in Jesus Christ should live without sin in my life.

"Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Most people's think of baptism only as water baptism. But John the Baptist said of Jesus in, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, ... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." While other commentaries are not so dogmatic, *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, distinguishes the language of Scripture between water baptism and baptism by the means of the Spirit. Water baptism is "in the name of" as in Matt. 28:19. "Go therefore and make disciples ..., baptizing them in the name of the ... ." Spirit baptism is referred to as we have it here as *baptism into Christ*. Gal. 3:27 is another example, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Jesus promised His disciples the night before He was crucified that after He ascended to heaven, God would send us the Holy Spirit. As believers we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit who empowers us to live our lives as we should. But this is only empowerment, we must allow the Holy Spirit to do His work.

We "were baptized into His death" and "We were buried with Him through baptism into death." Water baptism is said to picture the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That analogy works well when water baptism is conducted in the manner it was done in the Bible, by immersion. Nowhere in the Bible do we find an example of babies being baptized. Baptism is not a ritual that replaced circumcision under the Old Testament Law. Under the Law, given through Moses, only males were circumcised. It was to be a sign to the world that these circumcised men were followers of Yahweh. The people of Israel were not saved by circumcision, but through their faith in Yahweh. Water baptism in the New Testament is for all believers who have been saved through faith.

"We also should walk in newness of life." Paul's choice of words is clear. He does not say that now that we are believers in Jesus Christ, we will "walk in newness of life." He says we "should walk in newness of life." We have the power of the Holy Spirit working in us to enable us to be able to "walk in newness of life." Paul wrote this letter to the Romans to tell them how they could and should "walk in newness of life." God has provided me the divine resources through His word and the Holy Spirit to live my life as He would have me to live. I need to know His word, and then do it.



**Tropical Kingbird, Brownsville, Texas**

Rom. 6:5-8. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,

In 1958 I was blessed to hear Dr. Donald G. Barnhouse in person at the triennial Urbana Conference hosted by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF). I was impressed. The only other speaker I remember at the conference was Billy Graham. But Dr. Barnhouse was the one from whom I learned the most. So in 1960 when I entered graduate school in Philadelphia I attended his church for a few months. But Dr. Barnhouse did not preach during that period. Airline flights took much longer then than they do today and I did not return home over Thanksgiving. I made arrangements with my former college roommates to stay in my old dorm room and go to church in Troy, New York. My former pastor suggested I try Grace Chapel. It always pays to seek godly advice. At Grace Chapel I received good Bible teaching and met my future wife. Thank you, Lord.

In his commentary on Romans, Dr. Barnhouse summarizes this difficult passage well. "This text shows beyond question that the Lord God, ... desires us to live holy lives free from the tyranny of sin. His purpose is not merely that we be saved for eternity but that we be kept, saved and triumphant, in our life here." Rom. 6:8 says, "We believe that we shall also live with Him." Jesus died, but God raised Him from the dead. Because of Christ's resurrection both God the Father and the God the Son have sent the Holy Spirit to empower our lives to enable us to live lives obeying God.

Gal. 2:20. "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." I am no longer a slave of sin. I now have freedom to choose to live for God and not to continue in my old sinful ways. In reality, my life is bit of both. By faith, I can spend more time living for God.

In his *Notes* Dr. Constable states, "The New Testament ... presents the Christian as a person with one sinful nature (the flesh) that is in conflict with the indwelling Holy Spirit." In Gal. 5:16-18 Paul wrote, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." Then in Gal. 5:24-25 Paul adds, "Those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."

2 Pet. 1:3-4 says, "His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust." God has given me His word so that I can learn about Him. He has also given me the Holy Spirit to help me understand His word and also to provide the power to overcome my fleshly desires.

One last quote from Dr. Barnhouse. "God does not want us to be slaves of sin. If you are out of His will, even for a moment, it is because you have chosen to be so. God wants you in fellowship with Him. He wants you not only to be His child, but to behave as His child."

Rom. 6:9-11. knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For *the death* that He died, He died to sin once for all; but *the life* that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

"Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more." In the past I had a pastor who often pointed out the words in the Bible that spoke about something we should know or that we know. I learned that it is important to know what the Bible says, and then to apply that information to my life. Recently we had a visiting preacher at church. He took a portion of Scripture and did what too many preachers do. He read the text and then spent ninety percent of his time talking about his subject which was only marginally related to his text, if it was related at all. His point was correct, that we should not be angry. Anger is a sin. But he did not teach the congregation what his chosen text said. He read the text and spent thirty minutes telling us not to be angry.

Dr. Roy Zuck wrote a couple books on Bible interpretation. The idea with which I came away from a study of his principles in a group of pastors and laymen was that you should spend ninety percent of your time studying what the text says and its interpretation. Then the remaining ten percent is spent in application. Application is different for each person. But if you don't understand what the text says or if you interpret it incorrectly, how can you make a proper application?

So Jesus "having been raised from the dead." This is resurrection. He will not die again. He will never face death again. In John 11:43 Jesus told Lazarus to "Come forth" from the grave. Lazarus was not resurrected. He was resuscitated. Lazarus died again. Christ was resurrected. He will not die again.

"He died to sin once for all." Jesus did not have any sin of His own. God imputed our sins to Jesus when Jesus was on the cross. Now the text today says, "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin." "Reckon" sounds to me like a good Texas word. It is used in a few translations while others say "consider." Both are correct translations if we understand the words. Paul uses the same Greek word elsewhere. In Rom. 4:3 Paul wrote, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Then in Rom. 4:4 he said, "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt." Both the words "accounted" and "counted" in these verses are good translations of the same Greek word translated "reckon" or "consider." Each time Paul used the words in the same sense, but we have the words translated differently. Looking at Dr. Barnhouse's Romans commentary again, He said, "to reckon is to act upon a set of facts, despite difficulties or obstacles." Dr. J. Vernon McGee said, "'Reckon' doesn't mean I 'reckon' or 'suppose.' as some of us Texans use it. Rather, we are to *count* on the fact that we are dead unto sin and alive unto God." I see that "reckon" is used here as a word for faith. If I believe that I am dead to sin, then I can know that I don't need to give into the sin that is enticing me.

"Likewise." I should do what Jesus did and "Live to God." Rom. 6 is all about how I as a believer in Jesus Christ should live my life. Paul wrote "Reckon" as a command. While God gives us commands in His word, it is my choice whether I obey. I am not a puppet with God pulling the strings so that I do what He wants me to do. God saved me through my faith. Now God wants me to learn to live by faith. Obeying God's commands is an act of faith.



**Red-patched Emerald, moth, Polk Co., Texas**

Rom. 6:12-14. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

I am a believer in Jesus Christ. As Paul explains in Rom. 4:3-5, I am perfectly righteous in God's eyes since He has deposited to my heavenly account Jesus' righteousness. But that does not mean that as a believer I will live righteously. In Rom. 6, Paul tells me that I need to live my life in a righteous manner. He also explains the divine provisions that God has made so that I can live like He wants me to live. That is a lot of words to say that I, even as a believer, have a choice as to how I live my life. In Rom. 7 Paul goes into detail discussing the conflict that even Paul had in his life as a believer in whether to follow the way of his flesh and old nature, or to live as God commanded him. In Rom. 8 Paul writes about how the Holy Spirit functions in the life of a believer. All too often preachers teach this section of Romans as contrasting the way unbelievers live with how believers live. But Paul is writing to believers. Sometimes I fail the Lord and commit sin.

Paul begins Rom. 6:12, "Therefore." He gives us a command based on what he has just written in Rom. 6:11. "Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." OK, as a believer I am indwelt by Christ at the moment I believed. There is a theological principle that Paul speaks of elsewhere in his letters. This is technically called "positional truth." Eph. 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ." These are permanent blessings we receive at the moment of salvation when God considers our position as being "in Christ." These blessings cannot be lost. Jesus' indwelling cannot be lost. But we can miss out on its power in our lives. So Jesus commanded us in John 15:4, "Abide in Me and I in you." John explained the function of this "abide" command in more detail in his first epistle. 1 John 2:6 says, "He who abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked." I understand Paul to be saying in Rom. 6 that we are to walk by faith in our Christian lives and utilize God's provision for our spiritual life that He has provided through the indwelling of Jesus Christ. In 1 John 1:3 John called this "fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus."

Paul then gives us a couple of commands. First, "do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lust." As Dr. Kenneth Wuest wrote in his *Expanded translation of the New Testament*, "Stop allowing the sinful nature to reign as king in your mortal body." This is an ongoing process that I need to do constantly. The second command is "Do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God." The tense of the Greek verb command for "present" is different from the tense of the command to "reign." The idea I get from the tense of "present" is that when I allow sin to take over in my life I need to stop and let the power of God take over again. Then to continue to walk just as Christ walked.

Then as I present the members of my body "as instruments of righteousness to God," I am no longer allowing sin to "have dominion over" me. In Dr. Constable's *Notes* on these verses he presents a chart on a believer's three-fold enemy and the Bible solution. The world with the lusts of the flesh and the eyes and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-17). The solution: 2 Tim. 2:22 "Flee also youthful lusts." The flesh (Rom. 6:12-13), "Do not let sin reign. The devil (1 Pet. 5:8-9), "Resist him" and again in James 4:7. "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

Rom. 6:15-19. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness? But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human *terms* because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members *as* slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness *leading* to *more* lawlessness, so now present your members *as* slaves of righteousness for holiness.

Five hundred years ago when the reformers (Luther, Calvin, and others) realized that the Bible teaches that we are saved through faith, and not by our works, the Roman church called them heretics. To the church of that time taking works out of salvation was just a license to sin. The purpose of the Law in the Old Testament was to demonstrate to the people of Israel that they were unable to keep the Law on their own. They needed a Savior. God promised them that the Messiah would come. Paul comes along and taught that believers are no longer under the Law, but they have a new standard, called grace. Under grace we can choose to obey God. God now has given us His completed canon of Scripture plus the indwelling of the members of the Godhead. We have the Holy Spirit who teaches us and empowers us to obey. But again, I must choose to utilize these divine resources.

I can choose to continue to live as a slave of sin or I can choose to obey God. "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey." It is the next clause that gets us into trouble. "Whether of sin *leading* to death." What does Paul mean by death? This is not the first time Paul has mentioned death, dying and dead in this chapter. I did a quick count and found something like eleven references in the prior 14 verses. Paul was writing to believers who possess eternal life. He is not saying that people who are slaves of sin are unbelievers who are headed to the Lake of Fire. I don't even think that he is talking about the possibility of a sinning believer dying the sin unto death. When I sin, my spiritual life is dead. I am not walking with God. My fellowship with God is dead. I have heard pastors call this "carnal death."

"Whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness." These back-to-back clauses demonstrate the two options. Notice that sin is parallel to obedience. Those are our two choices. The result of the two choices are then death or righteousness.

"God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered." In Rom. 6:17 it sounds like Paul is encouraging his Roman readers that they are doing the right things. They had turned from their slavery to sin when they were unbelievers and were now obeying the doctrine they had been taught. The word "delivered" is translated variously as "delivered," "entrusted," or "committed."

But Paul knows that at times his readers will fail. So he writes, "So now present your members *as slaves of* righteousness for holiness." Most modern translations render the word "holiness" as "sanctification." Both "holiness" and "sanctification" mean to be "set apart." But that never helped me much to understand what the words mean. I like to think of it as my Christian life is distinct from that of my unbelieving friends who are following the world and its way of thinking, as well as the world's sinful ways. Even though God gives me grace, He commands me to obey.

Rom. 6:20-23. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things *is* death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This chapter of Romans has repeated over and over again in various ways, how I as a believer should live my life. I am to know something. Rom. 6:3-4. "Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ...even so we also should walk in newness of life." Rom. 6:6. "Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." Rom. 6:9. "Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more." Rom. 6:16. "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey."

Once we know these things, then we are to believe them, acting upon them in faith. Rom. 6:8. "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him." Rom. 6:11. "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Now that I know these things and believe or reckon that they are true, I must act upon that faith. Rom. 6:4. I should "walk in newness of life." Rom. 6:12. I am not to "let sin reign in" my mortal body. Rom. 6:13. I am not to "present my members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, ..." "but present" myself to God, and my members "as instruments of righteousness to God." Rom. 6:17. I am to obey "from the heart that form of doctrine (teaching) to which" I was committed. Rom. 6:19. I am to become a "slave of righteousness for sanctification."

This chapter is all about living a life of righteousness in obedience to God. Rom. 6:20-23 presents two alternative results for saved believers. The results are dependent upon how a believer lives his life. Rom. 6:21. "For the end of those things (sins, slavery to sin) *is* death." Rom. 6:23. "For the wages of sin *is* death." The second alternative: Rom. 6:22. "Having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to sanctification, and the end, everlasting life." Rom. 6:23. "The gift (grace) of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Jesus died for my sins as well as for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:1-2, believers and unbelievers). At the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:11-15 unbelievers are judged by their works, not by their sins. God saved me through my faith, not by my works. So death that results from the wages of sin here is not an eternity in the Lake of Fire. For a believer it is facing divine discipline from God. It is God giving the sinning believer over to even greater sins as in Rom. 1:26-32. It is a life without fellowship with God. We lose the blessing of the fruit of the Spirit of Gal. 5:22-23: "love, joy, peace, ..." The alternative eternal life promised in these verses refers to the quality of life of a growing believer walking with the Lord. The quality is here on earth and also throughout eternity. Every believer from the point of salvation possesses the infinite quantity of eternal life. In John 10:10 Jesus promised believers an abundant life over and above eternal life. "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly." It is the intimate relationship of knowing the only true God. John 17:3. "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." Then in the future Millennial Kingdom and afterwards in the New Heaven and New Earth of Eternity, the quality of a believer's eternal life will be determined by their rewards received at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Rom. 7:7-10. What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet." But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all *manner of evil* desire. For apart from the law sin *was* dead. I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which was to *bring* life, I found to *bring* death.

"*Is* the law sin? Paul gives the obvious answer to this rhetorical question, but why did he ask it? In Rom. 7:6, he has stated, "But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not *in* the oldness of the letter." Rom. 3:20 tells us the purpose of the law. "For by the law *is* the knowledge of sin." The law was to tell us how we should live, but it had no power to enable us to live by it. Now that we know what sin is, our rebellious sin nature, kicks in. I don't want someone else to tell me what I should do. This is the same principle Paul describes in Rom. 1:20-21, "For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, ... because although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened." "I would not have known sin except through the law." Paul gave the solution in Rom. 7:6 "We should serve in newness of the Spirit"; and expands it even more in Rom. 8. After Jesus' ascension He sent the Spirit to indwell us and to empower us through the filling of the Holy Spirit, if we allow Him to do so.

"I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died." When was this time that Paul said he "was alive without the law"? He was born under the law as a Jew, and came to Jerusalem to study and prepare to be a Pharisee, strictly following the law. Many interpret Rom. 7 with the idea that Paul is contrasting his former life as an unbeliever with his present life as a believer. Others take a different position that Paul is explaining how he tried to live in obedience to the law as a new believer and his flesh kept getting in the way. In Rom. 7:21-22 he wrote, "I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good, For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man." As a new believer Paul was a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) and this new creation he calls here "the inward man" delighted in the law of God. He now had new power through the Holy Spirit to keep the law. He never had this before he believed in Jesus Christ. But his flesh kept getting in the way. In his flesh "nothing good dwells" (Rom. 7:18).

Understanding these verses in this way shines a bright light on the reality of my attempts to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). As Paul explains in this chapter, I am only too aware of my failures. "The commandment, which *was* to *bring* life, I found to *bring* death." My excursions into sin do not mean that I am unsaved or have lost my salvation. This is carnal or fleshly death. I am living according to my "old man" (Eph. 4:22). This is the old man which has been "crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20). But this old man is still hanging on and not completely dead. The final death of the old man will happen when I receive my new resurrection body (2 Cor. 5:1-4).

I am constantly confronted with a choice. Will I walk in the power of the filling of the Holy Spirit? Or will I "grieve the Holy Spirit" (Eph. 4:30) or "quench the Spirit" (1 Thess. 5:19)? When I sin, I need to confess my sins. God forgives me and cleanses me from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). How a person understands Rom. 7 will determine how he understands Rom. 8. Misunderstanding the Bible will lead to bad application. Good application comes from correct interpretation.

Rom. 8:1-2. There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

I have heard excellent pastors teach Rom. 8:1 in two different ways. These are pastors with whom I have a lot of respect and agree with what they teach most of the time. The interpretation with which I do not agree says that the phrase "in Christ Jesus" refers to our position as believers in Jesus Christ. For this reason we will not come under condemnation and will spend eternity with Christ. Of course, this is a true statement, but is this what this verse is saying? Context is important.

This verse also has a textual variant. The statement "who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" is not found in two of the four oldest manuscripts of the New Testament. These four oldest manuscripts are the basis for the proliferation of new translations over the last 100 or so years. The argument is that since these four manuscripts are older, they must be better than the hundreds of more recent manuscripts. The guideline that the compilers of the text that is the basis for the modern translations used was that if two of the four older manuscripts agreed, then they could use the variant. In this case two of the four had the variant sentence and two did not. The compilers chose to leave the sentence out. The omitted sentence tells us who the believers are who do not come under condemnation. The sentence tells us that these believers are walking in fellowship, i.e. abiding, in Jesus Christ as Jesus commanded us to do in John 15:4, "Abide in Me, and I in you."

Note also that Rom. 8:1 says "therefore now." "Therefore" introduces a conclusion from what Paul has just written in Rom. 7. That is the context issue. "Now" is a time word. It tells us that now is the time that there is "no condemnation." This does not refer to some future prophesied judgment. What did Paul just finish writing about in Rom. 7:19-20? "For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me." If Paul is contrasting his former life as an unbeliever when he wanted to do good, but did evil, with his life as a believer when he is now no longer sinning, then the "condemnation" of Rom. 8:1 could be confirming that he will not spend eternity in the Lake of Fire. But I see Paul comparing the conflict that goes on in a believer's life between the flesh which still wants to sin, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer that enables him to live in obedience to God. My understanding is that the context both before and after "there is no condemnation" better fits my walk as a believer. Will I live under the power of the Holy Spirit or will I give in to sin?

I have also heard pastors talk about the Greek word translated "condemnation." On one hand, some will say it always refers to eternal condemnation. Others point out that Paul used a related compound word in Rom. 8:1 for "condemnation." Paul used this related compound word two other times in Rom. 5:16 and 18. This is the only three times it is used in the Bible. The compound word adds a prefix meaning "according to." Without the prefix the word is looking at judgment. By adding the prefix the word points to the punishment arising from the judgment. Pastors that pointed out this difference to me referenced a couple of Greek lexicons from which they received their understanding.

"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." What Paul is talking about in Rom. 6-8 is my daily walk as a believer. If I walk according to the flesh, I can expect condemnation (punishment) "now" in the form of divine discipline (Heb. 12:5-6).

Rom. 8:2-5. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those *who live* according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

In Rom. 7:24-25 (at the end of the chapter) Paul writes, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." He is talking about the struggle each of us, as believers in Jesus Christ, face as we try to live our Christian lives. We want to please God and do the right things, but we still have the sin nature with which we were born. My understanding of what Paul is writing is from Dr. Lewis S. Chafer's classic book, *He That Is Spiritual*. As the text says, we either "walk according to the flesh" or "according to the Spirit."

The Old Testament has shown that the Law God gave to Israel through Moses taught the people what sin was. But this Law did not contain any provision for enabling Israel to keep the Law. Jesus promised His disciples in John 14:26 and again in John 16:7 that after Jesus' ascension He would send the Holy Spirit to them to teach them all things that Jesus had taught them. But we have a choice. We can set out "minds of the things of the flesh," or "the things of the Spirit."

This is not something new that Paul was teaching the Romans. Paul wrote very much the same thing to the Galatians. In Galatians he wrote that today we are not under the Old Testament Law. We operate on the basis of grace. Gal. 5:13-14 calls it "liberty." "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Then in Gal. 5:16-17, Paul added, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish." That last verse sounds similar to what Paul wrote about himself in Rom. 7. In Gal. 5:19-21 he gives us a laundry list of fifteen to seventeen sins plus "and the like." Paul calls these the "works of the flesh." I have had to confess several of these sins to God. I suspect that all believers, if they were honest, have done the same.

Gal. 5:22-23 is the well known package: "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, ..." I say package because the word "fruit" is singular. If a believer is walking in the Spirit all nine of these qualities characterize the believer's life. If I lack one of them, I have stepped off into one of the sins of the flesh. The "fruit of the Spirit" begins with "love." Did you notice how Paul in Gal. 5:13-14 defined the law that we as believers should live by? "Through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, ... 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Back in Rom. 8:4, "That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us." How do we do that? By walking "according to the Spirit." Remember what Jesus told His disciples in the Upper Room, John 13:35: "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." How many times have I done something that hurt another person? Sometimes inadvertently, but more often intentionally. Either way that does not meet Jesus' standard of love.

Rom. 8:6-9. For to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.

Paul appears to be repeating with different words what he has already written. We are either living our Christian lives under the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, or we are living just like an unbeliever. Are we following the dictates of our flesh or old man? In Eph. 4:22-24 Paul expresses similar concepts. "That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God in true righteousness and holiness." When we were born again by faith in Jesus Christ, God created a new man in us. God wants me to live as the new man He has created. "For to be carnally minded *is* death." If I am carnally minded, thinking like my old unsaved self, I am in rebellion against God. "The carnal mind *is* enmity against God." "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God." Why? Because even when I do good works under the functioning of my old man, I am seeking to promote myself. My motives are wrong. I am producing as it were "wood, hay, straw" (1 Cor. 3:12) which will be burned at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The alternative as Paul says in Eph. 4:23 is "to be renewed in the spirit of your mind." Paul explains this in Rom. 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." One of the purposes for which God has given us the Holy Spirit today is to teach us God's word so that we can "put on the new man." When I do that, then I can "be spiritually minded." The "carnally minded" believer can expect death. His walk with God is dead. He is facing possible divine discipline from God. His life is not producing "gold, silver, precious stones" which will be purified by fire at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The "spiritually minded" believer is not in rebellion against God, and so is at peace with God. He will enjoy the more abundant life (John 10:10), walking in fellowship with God. For the "spiritually minded" believer there is also the potential for rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ that will continue throughout eternity. The "spiritually minded" believer also experiences "the fruit of the Spirit ... love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" of Gal. 5:22-23.

God has given me His word and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit so that when I utilize these divine resources in my life, God is glorified. When I live under the desires of my flesh and my old man, I am trying to please myself, not God. I want to look good from the standpoint of the world.



Red Phalarope, Jersey Village, Texas

Rom. 6:10-13. And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

“And if Christ is in you.” There are two senses in which we can say that Christ is in us. The first is the indwelling of Jesus Christ. Col. 1:27 speaks of Jesus’ indwelling of believers. “To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” There is a second sense in which the Bible says that Jesus is in believers. In John 15:4-5 Jesus told His disciples, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” This is the two way street of our fellowship with Christ in our daily walk with God. In the following verses of John 15, Jesus explained how believers can have this mutual abiding. John 15:7, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ...” John 15:10, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love.” This two way street requires that I know God’s word and that I obey it. Both senses are true. I have heard this verse taught both ways.

The Spirit *is* life because of righteousness.” The *New American Standard Bible* translates this, “the spirit is alive because of righteousness.” This follows when we consider the prior clause which reads, “the body *is* dead because of sin.” We have our material body contrasted with our eternal immaterial being called here “spirit.” Then is the “righteousness” the imputed righteousness we receive when we believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior or is it the experiential righteousness we demonstrate in our lives when we know and obey God’s word? If the other translations are correct and “Spirit” refers to the Holy Spirit, then the Spirit is giving life to the believer as the believer reckons himself “to be dead indeed to sin” (Rom. 6:11) and does not let sin reign in his mortal body (Rom. 6:12). As I reviewed this memorized verse in the past, I have often asked myself why this is not referring to the human spirit. Since Paul in Rom. 8 is telling us why we should be “spiritually minded” and not “carnally minded,” I think looking at the “spirit” here in Rom. 8:10 as our new man, the eternal immaterial part of our being, is the best approach.



Spotted Towhee, Schertz, Texas

Rom. 8:14-17. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God." In these verses today Paul refers to the "sons of God" and then in Rom. 8:16 to "children of God." In the Greek he uses two different words. The word for "sons" is for an adult or mature son. While the word for "children" is for a young child, not yet having reached maturity. As we grow spiritually, having learned God's word and applying it in many different situations, we should find ourselves following the leadership the Holy Spirit more than we do walking according to our flesh. "For as many as ..." Many believers are led by the Holy Spirit, but not all. This statement is not a test of whether a person is saved, but a test of spiritual maturity.

"For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear." In Rom. 6:6 Paul had written "that we should no longer be slaves of sin." We are no longer slaves of our flesh. We live under grace, so it is up to me whether I submit to the working of the Holy Spirit in my life or listen to the desires of my flesh. When I choose to be led by the Holy Spirit, I am acting like a mature son of God. "Abba, Father" uses both the Aramaic word for father and the Greek word. This speaks of the fellowship relationship that a believer who is walking in obedience to God can experience.

"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." Most of our translations translate the word for witness as "witness with" which is in keeping with the "with" prefix attached to the Greek word verb for "witness." This is in keeping with the Old Testament principle carried over into the New Testament that requires two or three witnesses to determine the truthfulness of an issue. So both the Holy Spirit and our human spirit bear witness to God that we are His children. As "children of God" we are "heirs of God." We possess eternal life and will inherit the blessings of eternity in the "new heaven and new earth" (Rev. 21:1).

The original texts of Scripture were written with all capital letters, no spaces between words and no punctuation. Our translators have done an excellent job in preparing our Bible translations in a readable format. In this case three older translations have inserted a comma after "heirs of God," that is not in our more modern translations. These are the nineteenth century *Darby Bible*, *American Standard Version* and the *King James Bible*. The insertion of the comma differentiates the "heirs of God" from the "joint heirs with Christ." All believers are "heirs of God." We will spend eternity with God in the Millennial Kingdom and then forever afterward in the "new heaven and new earth." Rom. 8:17 says that the "joint heirs with Christ" are those who suffer with *Him*." How I as a believer handle the sufferings, persecutions, and adversatives of life is the criteria for determining those who will be "joint heirs with Christ" and who "may also be glorified together" with Him. The issue is works. Do I fall back into the sins of the flesh when I face the daily problems and sufferings of life. Or do I apply God's word and utilize the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome the trials and temptations that come my way? Since I am not saved by my works, being a "joint heir of Christ" will be determined at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Consider these two sentences showing the importance of comma placement. "Woman, without her man is nothing." "Woman, without her, man is nothing."

Rom. 8:18-21. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

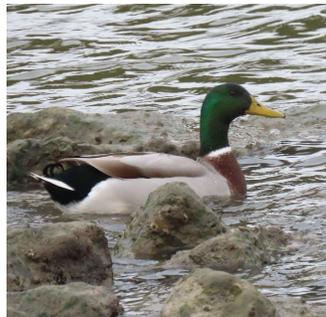
Rom. 8:17 spoke of the believers who will be "joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may be glorified together." Now in Rom. 8:18 he continues the subject of suffering. "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us." 2 Cor. 4:17 speaks of our "light affliction." "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory." In comparison to our future in the Millennium and in the eternal "new heaven and new earth" the present sufferings we endure now are called a "light affliction." They do not appear to be light when we face them in life.

Notice also that Paul picks up the "sons of God" (Rom. 8:14) and the "children of God" (Rom. 8:16) in today's verses. The "sons of God" in both Rom. 8:14 and Rom. 8:19 are mature believers who are led by the Holy Spirit in the way they conduct their lives. When faced with suffering and affliction, they apply God's word and do not lean on their own solutions which arise from their flesh and the thinking of the world. The "children of God" in Rom. 8:17 and Rom. 8:21 are all believers in Jesus Christ who also are delivered from the slavery of their sinful flesh into an entirely new life in God's promised Millennial Kingdom. All believers will receive a resurrection body and will no longer have to contend with their flesh or old man. 1 Cor. 15:51-52. "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

"For the creation was subjected to futility." This looks back at Gen. 3:14-19 when God issued His judgments on the serpent (Satan), Adam, Eve, and the entire world. God said to Adam in Gen. 3:17-19, "Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground."

After Paul reminded us of this judgment, he also recalled the promise that God gave to Adam and Eve. Paul wrote, "but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope." Included in this judgment was the promise of a future Savior. Gen. 3:15, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." Our created world now exists in this state of hope, confident assurance, that God will deliver us from this judgment under which we now live into the glorious Kingdom He promised to Israel. We will be part of it.

Paul spoke of "the sufferings of this present time." Today we have concerns with inflation, rising interest rates, the threat of a recession and potential loss of jobs and income, fear of crimes committed against us, diseases like Covid or monkeypox or whatever comes next. Am I prepared from what the word of God says, to deal with the next bad situation with which the world afflicts me?



**Mallard, Seabrook, Texas**

Rom. 8:22-23. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

“For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs ... even we ourselves groan within ourselves.” Our world is under the curse of sin. Everyone living in the world knows this from what we see and experience. All life, both animal and plant life, suffer because of Adam’s original sin. Plants are effected by lack of rain, weather that is too hot or cold, or too much sun or too little. Animals must fend for themselves to obtain food and are also effected by the weather. In Gen. 2:15 God commanded Moses to tend the Garden and keep it. In Gen. 1:28 the command to man was to fill the earth, subdue it and to have dominion ... over every living thing. Man is responsible for protecting and maintaining this world. But we keep on trashing it. God blesses us in that the world He created has self-correcting mechanisms. Weather is cyclical. My wife’s Scandinavian ancestors named Greenland because a thousand years ago during a warming cycle the land was green, not covered with all the ice that is there now. Years ago one of my aunts loaned me a diary written in the mid-1800s by one of her husband’s ancestors in New Hampshire. The diary’s descriptions of the cold winters appear much colder than the four winters I experienced attending school in the northeast.

Believers also “who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves grown within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.” The unbelieving world mentioned in Rom. 8:22 see this world being trashed and vainly try to reverse what is happening. Some people speculate about a day when the earth will be uninhabitable and propose finding another planet in the universe to which to escape. But as believers who believe the Bible’s prophecies, we look forward to a different future, called “the redemption of our body.” A passage that describes this new body is 2 Cor. 5:1-2, “For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven.” Our present body with its sinful flesh is called a “tent.” But we will receive a new “building,” a resurrection body.

“The firstfruits of the Spirit.” Under the Old Testament Law, Israel was to give an offering to God of the firstfruits of their crops. This was an act of faith. When they offered the firstfruits, they were trusting God to provide for them out of the remainder of their crops. From an application standpoint for me today, do I give to the Lord when I have money left over at the end of a pay period? Or do I give when I am paid, and trust that what remains will pay my bills until the next paycheck? A rule of good financial management is that out of each paycheck, I give a portion to the Lord and set aside another part for savings or investment. Then I can spend the rest. But the New Testament adds a spiritual aspect to “firstfruits.” Eph. 1:13-14, “In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” The gift of the Holy Spirit to every person who believes in Jesus Christ is like the earnest money that we put up when we enter into a contract to buy a house. It is just a small part of God’s divine blessing to us. Even when problems arise in this devil’s world, I can look forward to: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17).

Rom. 8:24-27. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for *it* with perseverance. Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*.

Rom. 8:24-25 are common sense verses when we think about it. "Hope" is a confident expectation that what God has promised, He will do. "Hope" in a Biblical sense is not a kind of wish as we commonly use it when we say, "I hope so." So when God has fulfilled a promise, then the reality is present, so the "hope" is in the past. Consider 1 Cor. 13:13, "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these *is* love. Why is love greater than faith and hope? Neither "faith" or "hope" are eternal. Heb. 12:1 confirms this. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." In eternity both faith and hope will be in the past. We will see and experience God's fulfilled promises. The last word in Rom. 8:25 translated "perseverance" is probably better translated as in other Bible versions with "patience" or "endurance." "Perseverance" may reflect a theological bias of the translators. That kind of bias has no place in a translation.

"Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses." "Weakness" refers to our inabilities in prayer. Effective prayer is prayer "according to *the will of God*." God has revealed His will to us in His word. In the past I often added a statement to my prayer, such as, "if it is your will"; or I have prayed that God would show me His will in a matter. Most of the time these are situations where there is no right or wrong. These are issues that are not addressed in God's word. A trivial example: "I am selling some real estate property today. What should I wear to the closing?" This is a wisdom decision. As James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him." This is a prayer that I should have prayed on March 31, 1962, when I asked my present wife to marry me. Instead, in my ignorance of God's word at that time, I was probably asking God to show me if it was His will that I marry her? In both the Old Testament and the New Testament we are commanded not to marry an unbeliever. Since we were already both believers, I would not be disobeying God's will if I married her. Looking back and knowing now what Rom. 8:26-27 and Rom. 8:34 say, I am sure both the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ were interceding on my behalf. "If this starry-eyed ..., doesn't marry this one, he will go after a future flippitygibit idiot believer and mess up many lives." The next day, April Fool's day, she said, "Yes."

1 John 5:14 says, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." Rom. 8:27, "Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because he makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*." The "groanings" of Rom. 8:26 pick up on the "groans" of Rom. 8:22-23. These are the prayers of believers. This verse tells us that "the Spirit Himself makes intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered." "He who searches the hearts" shows us the intimacy, the unity and oneness of the three members of the Godhead. Both the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ in interceding for us, conform our prayers to that which conforms to the will of God. The answer may not be what we thought it would be!

Now I know that when I need to make a decision today, I should ask God for wisdom in that decision. If appropriate, I also should seek godly counsel. Sometimes I need to be reminded of this.

Rom. 8:28. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.

Rom. 8:28 is a favorite verse of many people. It is an encouraging verse. What is Paul telling us here? To understand that we have to go back and review the context. In Rom. 8:4 Paul writes "that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." He is continuing a discussion he began back in Rom. 6 about the conflict we as believers have between our flesh and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. In Rom. 8:18 he talks about two different inheritances. Every believer is a heir of God. But there is another inheritance that comes to believers who suffer with Christ. These believers who remain faithful through suffering are called "joint heirs with Christ." The purpose of suffering is that these victorious believers "may also be glorified together." These joint heirs are glorified together with Christ. Paul uses the word "also" suggesting that this inheritance is in addition to being "heirs of God." In Rom. 8:18 Paul gives us more details on the subject of suffering. Coming to Rom. 8:26 he speaks of our weaknesses. We don't know how to pray. When we face suffering, it is natural to pray about the suffering. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us "according to *the will of God.*"

What are the "all things" of Rom. 8:28. From the context, it sounds like Paul is talking about the sufferings that believers face in their lives. God doesn't cause the suffering. We suffer because Satan is the ruler of this world. Adam disobeyed God. We are all born sinners and other people suffer because of my sins. Believers suffer because of other people's sins. Rom. 8:24, "For we were saved in this hope:" This is our future deliverance from the suffering in this world. Heb. 12:1 shows us that "hope" is developed by our faith. Both prayer and hope are believers' defenses against suffering. When I face any problem or adversity, I need to pray about it and find the solution through applying God's word.

"All things work together for good to those who love God." Who are those who love God? There is a sense in which every believer can be said to love God. But in John 14:21 Jesus said, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And He who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." To use Paul's terminology, these would be believers who do not walk according the flesh, but according to the Spirit." When I fail to come to God in prayer as I run into problems and difficulties or when I don't know how to apply God's word to the situations, how can I expect God to work these things out for good?

"To those who are the called according to His purpose." There is no article in the Greek before the word "called." Believers "are called according to His purpose." God has a purpose for my life. When I turned 18, I received a draft registration notice, as did every other boy turning 18. So the week before I was to leave for college, I reported for my army physical. I was a day late! The officer looked at me. I don't remember exactly what he said, but it probably went something like this, "Why weren't you here yesterday? That's what this notice says!" Every believer has a calling from God. It is like a draft notice. Sometimes we obey. God wants me to glorify Him and obey Him in my life. When I obey God, I am walking by faith and growing in my spiritual life. God wants me to find the solutions to the problems of life in His word.



**Black-billed Magpie, near Fort Collins, Colorado**

Rom. 8:29-30, Part 1. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

The principal subject of these two verses is election and predestination. There appear to be three ways people usually deal with these two Bible teachings. People who understand that the Bible teaches that every person has a choice whether to believe or not to believe, say they don't understand predestination. So they ignore it. Then those who teach that God chose certain people whom He would save and left the rest of mankind in just condemnation say that each of us have no ability to choose for God. The third approach understands that the Bible teaches that every person can choose for God and in some way God has decided who would believe. They understand that these two ideas appear contradictory, and admit they do not know how God resolves the conflicting ideas.

When Augustine converted to the Roman Church after ten years following the syncretistic Manichean religion, he imported into Christianity the fatalism of the Manicheans. The sixteenth century reformers were heavily influenced by Augustine's teaching. This continues today in Reformed or Calvinistic theology. The underlying concept is God is sovereign. He is the Big Boss and what He says goes. God created this world and can determine whom He saves.

Those that believe that every person has a choice, consider the thinking that God predetermined whom He would save is not fair. God is not only sovereign, but He is also just. When God commands us to believe in Jesus Christ, He must have given us the ability to believe in Jesus Christ. Also they look at God's love. John 3:16, "For God in this way loved the world that He gave ..."

These two groups have a different understanding of the nature of God. All of God's attributes are perfect and infinite. They are eternal. One attribute, such as sovereignty, does not take precedence over the others. God's love does not rule supreme over His other attributes. The error of universalism focuses on God's love and concludes that since "God in this way loved the world," that in the end everyone will be saved. God is also omniscient meaning that He knew everything that is knowable. He knew what He was doing when He created the world. When I spent fifteen years active in venture capital, I reviewed innumerable business plans and developed a few business plans. Writing a business plan takes time and there are many things to consider. But God in His omniscience has always known the beginning to the end of this world He created. The Bible calls this God's foreknowledge. Foreknowledge is a subset of God's omniscience. Those who follow Augustine's teaching on election say that God only knows what He foreknew and that God's foreknowledge is the same as God's omniscience. They are diminishing the extent of God's omniscience.

Another error in the Augustinian understanding of predestination is the thinking that if each of us has volition, God's sovereignty is in jeopardy. If people have volition, then we can choose to override what God has decreed to be His plan. But that position overlooks God's omnipotence. God's omnipotence says that He has the power to do and to complete what He wants to do. When God decided to create this world, He did predestine everything that would happen. He wrote the history book of this world before He even created it. In His omnipotence, He has the power to make that history happen, even with man having volition to choose to obey God or not. Next time I will move past the theology to what these verses say. Is my understanding correct? In eternity, God will tell me better.

Rom. 8:29-30, Part 2. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

These verses are often understood from the standpoint of the eternal plan of God decreed in eternity past whereby He decided to create this world and that He would save some people. These people are the ones whom He foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and will glorify. There are no drop-outs in the progression as given in these two verses. Those whom God foreknew in eternity past are those who will be glorified in eternity. This interpretation flows naturally if they consider Paul's conflict within himself in Rom. 7:19, "For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; and the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice," as being a conflict Paul had in his life before his salvation. Then Rom. 8:4, is also understood as a contrast between believers and unbelievers when it speaks of people "who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." But Paul began Rom. 6:1, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" Then in Rom. 6:3 he adds, "Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?" Paul makes it clear that he is writing to believers about how to live our lives. In Rom. 8:17 he wrote about two different inheritances. All believers are heirs of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Other believers who suffer receive an additional inheritance as "joint heirs with Christ," "that we may also be glorified together." The Bible does not say that we are saved by "suffering for Jesus." We are saved through faith.

"Conformed to the image of His Son." This is the spiritual growth that is available to believers. As we grow spiritually our lives will look more like the life that Jesus lived on this earth. Rom. 8:28 says that "all things work together for good to those who love God." We love God when we walk according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh. When David sinned by committing adultery with Bathsheba and causing the death of her husband (murder), he received ten years of divine discipline from God, even though he confessed those sins and turned from them (repented).

When God planned this world, He knew instantaneously everything that would occur. This is what the Bible means by the word "foreknowledge." The word means "to know beforehand." God did not learn what the results of the freewill decisions of men would be. They were part of the plan. Nothing that happens is a surprise to God. His plan in eternity past included provisions for everything that happens and the end result is that God's eternal plan will be completed as planned.

Looking at the context of these two verses, God knew all the issues, problems, difficulties, suffering, you name it, I would face. He has provided the Holy Spirit and His word to enable me to overcome these situations in obedience to the way He wants me to do it. Believers who are victorious in their lives are the ones of whom these verses are speaking. They are the "many brethren" of Rom. 8:29 who are "conformed to the image of His Son." In Rom. 8:28 they are the ones who "love God." God knew beforehand what they would do. He determined their destiny beforehand, He called them, He justified them, and He will glorify them. 2 Tim. 2:12, "If we endure, We shall also reign with *Him*."

All believers in Jesus Christ are also foreknown by God, they have been predestined, They will be called and justified, but if they fail to abide in Him as 1 John 2:28 says, "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him." How I live my life today, will have consequences for all of eternity.

In short, God knew in eternity past that some believers would grow to spiritual maturity and be glorified by receiving rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Rom. 8:31-32. What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

These two verses contain three of the seven rhetorical questions that appear in the next nine verses. "What shall we say to these things?" Paul has covered a lot of ground so far in Romans. He has presented the amazing work that God is doing so that we can live lives that glorify God. In Rom. 6:3 he tells us that we have been baptized into Christ Jesus. In Rom. 6:4 "just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." In Rom. 7:6, Paul tells us "that we should walk in newness of the Spirit." In Rom. 8:4, "that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." In Rom. 8:17 Paul begins a discussion of believers who "suffer with *Him* (Jesus), that we may also be glorified together." In Rom. 8:26 "the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses." In Rom. 8:26, "the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us." In Rom. 8:28, "all things work together for good to those who love God." God has made an amazing provision of divine resources so that I can live my life as He tells me I should in His word. I can add nothing to this provision of God.

"If God is for us, who *can be* against us." When I was in junior high school, I memorized this verse. It has been a favorite of mine ever since. Back then I enjoyed reading Jules Verne's *Mysterious Island*. I learned about squids from this book since the heroes of the story were attacked by a giant squid. A squid is like an octopus, but it has ten legs. This verse has ten words, one for each of the legs of a squid. I wanted to design a personal flag depicting a squid holding one of these words on each leg. When I am walking with the Lord, God is on my side, working all things for good.

"He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things." Paul has picked up the "all things" in this verse from the "all things" in Rom. 8:28. But now Paul added the Greek article before the word for "all." I may be wrong, but it sounds to me like Paul wants us to remember the "all things" of Rom. 8:28 that are working "together for good to those who love God." If God has done the greater thing by giving His Son, Jesus Christ, to die as a substitute for my sin, certainly God can work all the sufferings and trials of my life for good.

What is the good that God is working through the sufferings and trials of life? Now, I am asking a rhetorical question. While all believers are "heirs of God," all believers also have the potential of being "joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may be glorified together" (Rom. 8:17). God could take every person who believes in Jesus Christ immediately into eternity the moment we believe. But He leaves us here for a purpose. It is for this purpose that He called us. He commissioned us to utilize these amazing divine resources with which He blessed us. God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans and in Gen. 12:2 commanded Abraham with words that read in our Bibles, "You shall be a blessing." Abraham's commission from God was a command to be a blessing to the entire world by his life of faith in Yahweh. Similarly, Israel was called by God. They were to be a witness to the entire world about Yahweh, their God. As Jesus told His disciples in John 13:35, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Through the power of the Holy Spirit, I can transform my mind with God's word so that I will not have my thinking conformed to the ideas of the world (Rom. 12:2). I want to handle the sufferings and trials of life God's way. I do not want to be led astray by the solutions the world offers.

Rom. 8:33-36. Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? *It is* God who justifies. Who *is* he who condemns? *It is* Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."

Here we have more rhetorical questions. "Who shall bring a charge against God's elect?" We better not ask Job that question. In Job 1:9-11 Satan accused Job before God. Rev. 12:10 says of Satan, "for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down." Satan is quick to remind God of all my sins and failures. But my defense attorney "who is at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for" me, speaks up on my behalf. The penalty has been paid. Not only that, but God has justified me by the imputation of Jesus' perfect righteousness.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" To answer that question in this section, Paul then asks the final question, naming seven ways he has suffered as he walked in obedience to God's word. "*Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" Then the world would tell Paul that if this is the way your God loves you, then you need to come follow the gods of sin, pleasure, fun, and start building a better world here and now. 1 Cor. 4:17-18 calls these sufferings "light affliction." "Light" in comparison to what our future holds. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal."

Paul then quotes Psa. 44:22, "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Paul continues his discussion of suffering which he introduced in Rom. 8:17, "Joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together." God allows this suffering from the natural course of events in a fallen world to come upon believers, that our faith in Him might grow. We may learn to love God more. We may "be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:28-29). Jesus told His disciples in John 16:33, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." I need to follow Jesus' example and learn to overcome the world. The world tells me today that if I speak the truth of God's word, I am engaging in hate speech. After World War Two the world formed the United Nations as a way to bring peace to this world and end war. But as Jesus said in Matt. 24:6, I continue to "hear of wars and rumors of wars."

The reality of life is that sinful natures, the flesh, of all mankind is ongoing. Each person will suffer in some way in this life. I called on a builder one time when I was seeking to build my mortgage business. He told me that he had made and lost four fortunes so far. He was working on fortune number five. I never got any loans from him. We have ups and downs in our business or in our jobs. Our cars break down or we have an accident, never at a good time. We get sick. We have misunderstandings or troubles with friends or family. Whatever comes my way, I must learn to work through it on the basis of God's word. "That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4).

Rom. 8:37-39. Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul closes out this section of his letter to the Romans with a magnificent promise to us. "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." When Paul writes "all these things," he is reminding us of what he has just written. In Rom. 8:35, he went through a list of seven ways He had suffered as a believer in Jesus Christ. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" He is still writing about the suffering mentioned in Rom. 8:17. All believers can expect suffering if we faithfully obey God and walk according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh.

"We are more than conquerors." It takes five English words to translate one Greek word. In the Greek this is a compound word attaching a prepositional prefix to the word for "overcomer." We are super-overcomers. Do all believers successfully conquer, endure, overcome the trials of life? If your employer tells you to do something that is wrong, do you do it so you won't lose your job? Today, Christians all over the world are told to deny Christ or they will lose their life? How do I handle a driving situation when someone cuts in front of me? However, Paul tells us that "through Him who loved us," we can be super-overcomers." I must choose to walk according to the Spirit and not according to my flesh. I must "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17) about the areas of suffering I face. Rom. 8:26 says "we do not know what we should pray for as we ought but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us." If I fail to pray, does the Spirit make intercession? Rom. 8:34 says Christ "makes intercession for us" also. 1 John 2:2 says that when I sin that "Jesus Christ the righteous" is my advocate, my defense attorney. For a believer to be an overcomer, or as this verse suggests a super-overcomer, will depend on whether I allow the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ to do their work in me. It is God's love for us that has provided His word and the powerful functioning of the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ that enable believers to live faithful lives for Him.

"For I am persuaded ..." Now Paul lists ten contrasts. The seven hardships of Rom. 8:35 are more physical whereas these ten lean toward the immaterial. They also are in pairs that represent extremes and include everything else in between. So I can know that God's love is always available to me. I need to learn to let God do His work in my life, and not do it my own way or the way the world would have me to live. "Neither death nor life." My eternal salvation is secure. "Nor (elect) angels nor (Satan and fallen angels, i.e. demons) principalities nor powers." "Nor things present nor things to come." No matter how bad things are now, they can even get worse. But through God's love, His divine provision is always available to me. "Nor height nor depth." These are two extremes that include everything in between. Do the two refer to heaven above and hell below? "Nor any other created thing." Paul is saying that if I can figure out anything that he left out, that even that won't be able separate me from the love of God.

"The love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." At the moment I believed in Jesus Christ I was entered into union with Christ. Pastors call this "positional truth." I am united with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection." Paul expresses this sometimes when he wrote that we are "in Christ." But Jesus also commanded us to "abide in Him." I am an overcomer abiding in Him when I keep His commands.

Rom. 9:3-5. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God. Amen.

Paul had just written in Rom. 8:38-39 that nothing can “separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” God has given us great promises and they are secure in Jesus Christ. But God also made promises to Israel. He promised Abraham that his descendants were to be as innumerable as the stars. He promised David that his Descendant would rule forever. Then Jesus came. He was crucified and went back to heaven. Do we now have a new bunch of promises that supersede God’s old promises to Israel? Is God playing some sort of shell game with us? The first shell is Israel. They failed, rejecting Jesus as their Messiah. The second shell is the Church. The Church has split up into hundreds of denominations and many cults. All of these could eventually fail and God will uncover the third shell to which He will fulfill all these old promises along with a bunch more. So Paul writes Rom. 9-11 showing that God’s promises to Israel will be fulfilled. If we don’t understand that Paul is focusing on Israel in these three chapters, we will not understand them.

“I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren.” Paul is exaggerating to make his point. Paul would like to do whatever he needs to do so that his Jewish brothers would believe in Jesus Christ and be saved now.

“To whom *pertain* ...” “The adoption. ...” Exo. 4:22, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Israel is My son, My firstborn.’” This has not changed. In the Old Testament “the glory” dwelt in the Tabernacle and then in the Temple until it left with the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians. God gave Israel the six blessings listed here and they still belong to Israel. Jesus Christ, Israel’s Messiah, came from Israel. He is “*the* eternally blessed God.” Paul confirms the deity of Jesus Christ.

In Matt. 23:37-39 Jesus confirms that God’s promises to Israel will be fulfilled. He addresses “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, ... How often I wanted to gather your children together, ... but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’” The Jews must do as Gen. 15:6 says Abraham did, “He believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” Note that Jesus said, “till you say.” There is coming a time when the Jews will acknowledge Jesus as their Messiah. This is how Paul will conclude these three chapters in Rom. 11:25-36.

God is not substituting the Church as the recipient of the fulfillment of His promises to Israel. We will participate in the blessings of those promises. But as Balaam the prophet said to Balak in Num. 23:19, “God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man that He should repent (change His mind).”

So what do I learn from these verses. As I pointed out above. Jesus Christ is fully God. Also my eternal salvation is secure. No matter how badly I mess up in disobedience to God, Jesus died for my sins, I believed and God gave me Jesus’ perfect righteousness. I cannot lose my salvation that God gave me.



**Yellow Grosbeak, Concan, Texas**

Rom. 10:9-11. that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

*The Grace New Testament Commentary* lists six different ways these verses are interpreted. Dr. Thomas Constable in his *Notes* writes: "Belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ meant belief that Jesus is Lord. ... While the resurrection is part of the good news of salvation, the gospel message (1 Cor. 15:3-4), belief in the resurrection of Christ is not a condition for salvation. A person could experience regeneration if he or she only knew and believed that Jesus Christ died for their sins—without knowing of His resurrection."

Dr. Barnhouse in his commentary on *Romans* wrote, "we must agree with practically all commentators that this passage is primarily addressed to the Jews, Paul's brethren according to the flesh. We can come to a deep understanding of the passage if we consider it, first, as a word that is addressed to Israel. We can then expand it to universal proportions and look upon it as a word that describes the transforming work of God in any individual, Jew or Gentile." To that I would add what another Bible teacher pointed out: Paul quotes twelve Old Testament passages in Rom. 10.

While many Bible teachers read these verses as requiring a public confession of the Lord Jesus as a condition for salvation, others realize that this would add a work to the gospel message. They have come up with multiple "work-arounds" to try to solve this conundrum. There is no way I can fully address the subject in a one page devotional. In short, I don't see these verses as talking about what a person must do to receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Confession is what God expects of me as a believer in Jesus Christ. But what does that have to do with the people of Israel?

Rom. 10:3 says, "Israel was seeking to establish their own righteousness." They were doing this by trying to keep the Law. They were not willing to believe that Jesus was their promised Messiah. In Rom. 10:13, Paul quotes Joel 2:32 which looks forward to the time when God will fulfill His promise of a future Kingdom for Israel. "Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." At the end of the Tribulation many Jews will have come to faith in Jesus Christ. As Jesus said in Matt. 23:39, "You shall see Me not more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'" Later in Matt. 24:13 when He was answering His disciples' questions about "what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age" (Matt. 24:3), Jesus said, "He who endures to the end will be saved." These statements about being saved refer to people of Israel who believe in Jesus Christ during the Tribulation and survive all the persecutions and martyrdoms to be delivered (saved) by the Second Advent of Christ. They enter into the promised Millennial Kingdom while still in their human bodies.

What is my take away today? I need to be a witness, readily confessing Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. Jesus' resurrection is a comfort and encouragement to me as Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 15. The same is true of the prophecies of the Rapture and God's other future promises. God gave me eternal salvation when I believed in Jesus Christ. Now I need to continue to exercise faith as I walk in obedience to Him. As Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 5:9, "Therefore, we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ." How I live today has consequences for all eternity.

Rom. 11:1-4. I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, "LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"? But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

"Has God cast away His people?" Paul begins this chapter with one of his rhetorical questions. This one expects a negative answer. The answer is translated here, "Certainly not." It is an emphatic "No." You can attach whatever expletive you want to reinforce the negation. God has not abandoned His promises to Israel.

Paul gives two examples to illustrate that God does keep His promises to Israel. The first illustration is himself. Earlier in his life Paul had engaged in a seek and destroy mission persecuting every believer in Jesus Christ he could find. Then he met Jesus on the Damascus Road; and he, himself, became a believer (Acts 9:1-18). If God had rejected Israel, then why did God save Paul, who was an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin?"

The second illustration is Elijah. Elijah had to flee for his life from Jezebel who swore she was going to have him killed. Elijah saw himself as the only person remaining in Israel who was faithful to God. His plea to God and God's answer which are quoted here are given in 1 Kings 19:10-18.

Throughout the history of Israel and the Jews, God has had a remnant who believed in Him. Sometimes that remnant was the majority of the Israelites, as in the time of the Exodus and the days of David. Other times, it was a smaller number, as in Elijah's case with only 7,000 men plus women. Even today there are many Jewish people who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. Some are well-known theologians, such as Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum and Dr. Michael Rydelnik. Both have amazing testimonies. In the Baptist church in which I grew up, we had a Jewish deacon and Sunday School teacher, Mr. Jake Kamin, who became a believer through the witnessing of my father's attorney.

"God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew." Many Bible teachers today twist the meaning of the words, "foreknew," "foreknow," or "foreknowledge" to fit theological preconceptions built on the traditions of men. The meaning of the words are easy to understand. They simply mean to "know beforehand." In eternity past when God decided to create this world, He knew what He was doing. He knew everything that would happen as He decreed this world to be. He knew everything from Gen. 1:1 through Rev. 22:21, as well as everything else that occurs in the history of this world. That is what is meant by God's foreknowledge. But God's foreknowledge is only a subset of His omniscience. God's omniscience includes everything that is knowable. That includes everything that could have happened if the angels and humankind made different decisions than the ones they do make. But some teach that God only knows what He foreknew which restricts God's omniscience to His foreknowledge. I believe my God knows what He has decreed, i.e., His foreknowledge, but also all the alternatives and options. Then there are those who say that God's "foreknowledge" is a synonym for the word "predestination." But here again, these are different words, with different meanings. Others say "foreknowledge" is a relationship word, which appears to me as a complete distortion of the words. I have been taught by men who have tried to faithfully understand God's word. I pray that my understanding is from God's word, and not merely the traditions of men.

Rom. 11:5-7. Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then *it is* no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if *it is* of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

Throughout history there have always been people who believed in God. During the time of Noah, after the death of Methuselah, there were only eight believers left. Noah, his wife, their three sons and the son's wives. In Rom. 11:4, God tells Elijah that he was not the only person faithful to God, but that there "were seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to Baal." Paul had written in Rom. 9:6, "They *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel." As used here, the remnant are descendants of Israel who have believed or who will believe in Jesus Christ.

"If by grace, then *it is* no longer of works." Paul is contrasting works and grace. They are total opposites. There is no middle ground. My works had nothing to do with God saving me. I believed and God saved me. There was no merit in my decision to believe what God has promised since it was not my faith that saved me.

"Israel has not obtained what it seeks." Rom. 9:31-32 says, "Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because *they did* not *seek it* by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law." Paul is speaking of Israel as a nation. There have always been individual Israelites who were part of the remnant who followed the example of Abraham and "believed in the LORD," and were saved. God chose Abraham to be the father of this great nation, through his son and grandson, Isaac and Jacob. The elect remnant who trusted in God have obtained the objective that Israel sought.

"The rest were blinded." When Moses and Aaron were dealing with the Pharaoh of Egypt over letting the children of Israel go, God brought ten plagues on Egypt. For the first five plagues the text says that Pharaoh hardened his heart. But beginning with the sixth plague, we are told that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. In reality, what had happened was that after saying "No" five times, Pharaoh had reached a point of no return. He was not going to let Israel go. God could have lowered the boom on Pharaoh and Egypt at the point, but He gave Pharaoh five more plagues. This is similar to what Rom. 1 tells us about believers and unbelievers who fail to obey God and trust Him. Rom. 1:24 says "God gave them up to uncleanness ..." Rom. 1:26 "God gave them up to vile passions. ..." Rom. 1:28, "God gave them over to a debased mind. ..." In Hebrews 5, the author had described believers who had stagnated in their Christian lives. So in Heb. 6:1 he says, "Let us go on to perfection" (maturity) and talks about what these stagnated believers should know. But in Heb. 6:3, the author adds, "And this we will do if God permits." These believers may not have enough time remaining in their lives to progress to spiritual maturity. In the case of Pharaoh, God continued to let Pharaoh say "No," so He could show the rest of the world that He is God and Israel was His people. Yes, the story of God bringing Israel out of slavery in Egypt spread throughout the world. Many believed in God because of it.

Our time in this world is limited. How best can I use it to bring glory to God? I need to know His word, and then to do it. If a believer moves away from God's word, and into sin, he can expect discipline from God. If he fails to confess the sin, the sin may compound in his life. God may give the believer up to a downward spiral of sin until God finally takes him home to be with Him.

Rom. 11:25-27. For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this *is* My covenant with them, When I take away their sins."

Romans is not an easy book to understand. Rom. 9-11 may be the toughest section of the entire letter. "For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery." My father loved mysteries, especially Agatha Christie. He had a few hundred of "who-done-its" that he kept reading over and over again. I eventually read them all myself. He was careful with the authors he read and would not read authors that used rough language. But this is not the way the Bible uses the word "mystery." Actually, our translators have simply transliterated the Greek word, which comes out in English as "mystery." *The Holman Christian Standard Bible* has a footnote on the word "mystery." The footnote says, "It is a secret hidden in the past but now revealed." Nowhere in the Old Testament is there even a hint that the Jews would reject their Messiah and that God would then hit the "pause" button with respect to Israel and also build a second people who might be faithful to Him, i.e. the Church composed of both Jews and Gentiles. Paul is now wrapping up his discussion in Rom. 9-11. His point in these three chapters is that God still has a plan and purpose for Israel. He will fulfill His promises to them.

"Until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." The fulfillment of God's promises to Israel must wait until the number of Gentile believers in the Church is complete. The Church will include a small remnant of Jews, but as we know it today, the majority of believers in the Church are Gentiles.

"And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written." The *Net Bible* reads "And in this way all Israel will be saved ...," which is a better way to understand this statement. *The Grace New Testament Commentary* lists five ways this statement has been understood. The word here translated "saved" does not always refer to our eternal salvation from the penalty of sin and to eternal life. It is often used in a more general sense of deliverance. When is the time that "Israel will be saved"? This will be when "The Deliverer will come out of Zion." Jesus, the Messiah (Deliverer) came, was rejected by the Jews, crucified, was resurrected, and has ascended into heaven. He will come for the believers in what we call the Rapture which will happen when "the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." After the Rapture God can finish His work and fulfill His promises to Israel. But first, Israel must come to faith in Jesus Christ as their Messiah. "He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; ... When I take away their sins." God does this during the time we call the Tribulation. At the end of that time there will be a large number of believing Jews living in Israel. This is what Jesus meant in Matt. 24:13 when He told His disciples, "He who endures to the end will be saved." Paul repeats this principle, "And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, the Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob." "The Deliverer will come ..." is a reference to Jesus' Second Coming at the end of the Tribulation. All the commentators I read agree that "all Israel" is not a reference to every single Jew, but to the nation as a whole. The "all Israel will be saved" are the people of Israel who come to faith in Jesus as their Messiah during the Tribulation. This is the story of Rev. 6-19.

I was in a business partnership for ten years with three Jewish men. My attempts to witness to them were futile. As this passage says, they were blind to the truth about Jesus Christ. But I also knew too little to even begin to be a good witness. I am still learning what God has given me in His word.

Rom. 11:28-32. Concerning the gospel *they are* enemies for your sake, but concerning the election *they are* beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable. For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.

"Concerning the gospel *they are* enemies for your sake." Israel is said to be an enemy because they have rejected the gospel. Except for a small remnant they have refused to believe in Jesus Christ. When Pilate was prepared to release Jesus, the Jewish mob followed the worldly thinking of their leaders and shouted, "Crucify Him" (Luke 23:21). I need to be careful to not be misguided by the thinking of the world, but to know God's word. That way, I will think as God wants me to think.

"Concerning the election *they are* beloved for the sake of the fathers." Now who or what is elected by God in this passage? When God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans and Abraham believed and obeyed God, God said to Abraham, "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing" (Gen. 12:2). It is the nation of Israel that God chose to be His people. As Paul wrote in Rom. 9:6, "For *they are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel."

"For the gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable." "The gifts" take us back to what Paul said in Rom. 9:4, "who are Israelites, to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises." God gave these gifts to the nation of Israel, to Abraham's descendants through Isaac and Jacob. But only the believers in Israel will enjoy these gifts. The same thing applies to every person in the world. Jesus died on the cross, paying the sin penalty for every person who has ever lived. But only those who accept the gift of the forgiveness of their sins by believing in Jesus Christ will benefit from that gift. The rest "will die in their sins" (John 8:24).

The word translated "irrevocable" is interesting. It is translated in the *King James Bible* as "without repentance." The word is also used in 2 Cor. 7:10, where it is translated "not to be regretted." A Greek Lexicon repeats the "not to be regretted" translation for 2 Cor. 7:10. For Rom. 11:29 it translates it as "of something, one does not take back." While the Greek word that Jerome mistranslated "repent" actually means to "change your mind," this word is the one carrying the idea of being sorry. "God has not cast away His people" (Rom. 11:2). He will fulfill his promises to Israel.

"God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all." Salvation is available to all people through faith in Jesus Christ. In the same way that God will fulfill His promises to Israel, I know He will fulfill what He has promised to me.



Blue Jay, Houston, Texas

Rom. 11:33-36. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out! "For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?" "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?" For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen.

Paul concludes these three chapters with this doxology of praise to God. "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God." God planned this world. He created it. He is executing His plan step by step, day by day. Nothing happens that is a surprise to Him.

"To whom *be* glory forever." This is one of the verses that tells why God created this world. We are here to bring glory to God. Even though we are sinful and fail to obey God, God's eternal plan included that He would save those who believe in Him and in His Son, Jesus Christ. His plan also includes the divine resources of His word and the Holy Spirit so that today, we who are a part of Jesus' body, the Church, can live lives that bring glory to God. God is glorified when we use these divine resources to obey Him and to walk in fellowship with Him.

God is glorified with the Old Testament patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who believed the promises God made to them and their descendants. God gave the Law to the nation of Israel and God is glorified when Israel obeyed His law. God will be glorified when He fulfills the promises He has made to Israel. When Jesus Christ returns at His Second Coming and delivers the surviving believers in Israel into the promised Kingdom, God is glorified.

The wisdom and knowledge of God, His judgments or decisions and His ways are incomprehensible to us. How can God create this world, including mankind in God's image with the ability of self-determination, fulfill His plan and purposes when Satan and His fallen angels and sinful people are trying to prevent God's plan from happening?

Why is all this fancy theological stuff important to me? In the Upper Room Jesus told His disciples that He would return for them and began this promise with John 14:1, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me." Paul gave a similar statement of encouragement in 1 Thess. 4:18 after he had repeated this same prophecy, "Therefore comfort one another with these words." So I can know that God will fulfill His promises and prophecies to me, just as He will do so to Israel. No matter how badly Israel fails, or I fail, God keeps His word. God knows every situation and adversity I will face in life. He has already made provision for it. When Paul prayed that God would remove the "thorn in the flesh" from Him, God answered in 2 Cor. 12:9. "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Paul's conclusion: "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."



Great Kiskadee, near Falfurrias, Texas

Rom. 12:1. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service.

Romans like many of Paul's letters begins with a heavy emphasis on doctrine (teaching) and theological principles. Then, in the second part of the letter, Paul moves to what all this heavy teaching should mean in the life of his readers. Rom. 12 is the turning point in this epistle to the Romans. Paul now moves into application. To practical issues, like how I should live.

"I beseech you." 2 Cor. 5:20 translates this word as "plead." "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us, we implore *you* (or *people*) on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." Paul is politely urging, begging, pleading for us, as believers, to witness to other people about being reconciled to God. "I beseech you" in Rom. 12:1 is a strong, but polite entreaty.

"Therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God." Paul has just mentioned "mercy" in Rom. 11:28. "For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all." But he also has given many examples of God's mercy in the preceding eleven chapters of Romans. "Therefore" alerts us that what Paul is now writing is based on what he has just already written. "Brethren." He is addressing believers.

"Present your bodies." Paul has previously commanded the Romans in Rom. 6:13, "And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God." In this verse in Rom. 6:13, we are not to live lives of sin under the control of our "old man" (Rom. 6:6). But we are not to "let sin reign in your mortal body" (Rom. 6:12). The idea in Rom. 6 is that this is our ongoing daily walk with God. In Rom. 12:1, the word "present" does not carry the same on-going idea. Because of this some have thought of this as a form on one-time dedication over and beyond our initial salvation. I see this more as an iterative process, to be done as often as necessary.

I have a poor understanding of Levitical offerings and sacrifices in the Old Testament. So I may not have this completely correct. But when a person under the Mosaic Law committed sins or trespasses, he was required to offer a sacrifice. Lev. 4:2 reads, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If a person sins unintentionally against any of the commandments of the LORD *in anything* which ought not to be done, and does any of them, ...'" a sacrifice is required. During the time of the Church, beginning on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, the Jewish sacrificial system does not apply to us. But what am I to do when I sin? 1 John 1:9 puts it this way, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." I am to confess my sins, when I sin. But if I turn around and immediately start to sin again, I have not restored my fellowship with God. I need to also make my body (my whole self) a living sacrifice to God. I am not to "let sin reign in my mortal body." So as often as necessary, when I sin, I am to present my "body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God." The word "holy" has taken on a meaning today that is far from the way it was understood by the original writers and readers of the Bible. Preachers correctly say it means to be "set apart." I see this as meaning "to be dedicated." When I sin, I am dedicating my life to myself, not to God. As one preacher explained it, the prostitutes in the idol temples were said to be "holy" because they were set apart (or dedicated) to the service of the idol. So when I present myself a living sacrifice to God, I am dedicated to faithfully obeying God and what He tells me in His word.

Rom. 12:2. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

"Do not be conformed... be transformed." Paul gives us two commands. Actually, they are one command because when we stop being conformed to the world, we will have transformed our thinking so that we are thinking the way God thinks. I hope I can explain what Paul is trying to tell us. These two commands in the Greek are in forms of the verbs which we do not have in English. A command in English is in the active voice. It is something that we are told to do. But both of these commands in the Greek are passive voice. These are commands that happen to us. That doesn't make sense to us since we don't talk that way.

Kenneth Wuest in his *Expanded translation of the New Testament* translates the first clause this way: "And stop assuming an outward expression that does not come from within you and is not representative of what you are in your inner being but is patterned after this age." Dr. Wuest liked translating these negative passive commands using the word "stop" as he does here. I would shorten his translation to read "stop being conformed." But we do not have a built-in switch that we can flip to do this. So Paul tells us to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Renewing our minds is an long-term, on-going process. Looking back at my school days, I started in nursery school, of which I have no memory. I know I went somewhere because my parents took a photo of me all decked out for nursery school. Then I started Kindergarten which I had to repeat. Followed by twelve years of grade school and six years of college, plus a year of work and writing to finish my graduate thesis. That was twenty years or more.

Paul tells us that we are to "be transformed by renewing your mind" (thinking). We do this by learning God's word. By our very nature we are conformed to the thinking of the world and the people around us. We are bombarded every day with ideas that run contrary to God and what He wants us to do. Without God's word, that is all I would ever know. "That you may prove." After I have learned God's word, I need to apply it. I learned that Jesus died for my sins. I placed my trust in Him. That was like a baby maybe rolling over for the first time. God has a lot more He wanted me to learn. The word "prove" is variously translated in the Bible as "prove," "test," "examine," and "find out," as a few examples. This is the process of spiritual growth that God expects of every believer.

"That you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Now God's will is "good and acceptable and perfect." So by transforming my mind through God's word, I don't see this as proving that God's will is "good and acceptable and perfect." But as I study and learn God's word, I find out what God's will is. It is up to me to do it. When I do God's will, I have obeyed the first command to "not be conformed to this world." I grew up in a Baptist church which taught me a mystical approach to the will of God. What is God's will where I go to school, what should I study, what kind of work should I do, should I take this job or that job, whom should I marry? These are all wisdom decisions. Learning God's word can provide wisdom for making these decisions. But other than a few commands in God's word that may apply to specific choices, usually the various choices all may be within God's will. Since my teenage years, I have sought to learn God's word and what He wants me to do. I got distracted and went off course sometimes. But I thank God that He has always provided me with solid Bible teaching churches and pastors.

Rom. 12:3-6. For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophesy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith;

"For I say, through the grace given to me." Paul is getting ready to tell us about the way spiritual gifts function today among believers. So when he mentions "the grace given to me," he has the spiritual gift that was given to him in mind. Paul is called an apostle meaning he had the spiritual gift of apostleship which was a temporary spiritual gift. Acts 1:22 gives one of the requirements for the gift of apostleship. An apostle must have been an eyewitness of Jesus' resurrection. That leaves out anyone who might later claim to be an apostle.

Paul tells us that every believer is "not to think more highly *of himself* than he ought to think." In 1 Cor. 12-14 Paul wrote three chapters dealing with the abuse of spiritual gifts in the Church at Corinth. Here in Romans he warns the believers to exercise their spiritual gift with humility. God gives each believer a spiritual gift so that each of us can serve God and minister to other believers. Paul says that these gifts come "as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." The "faith" here is the way we use our spiritual gifts. In Rom. 12:6-8 Paul lists seven gifts. The list is not exhaustive, but representative. The lists in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and 1 Peter differ. With some believers the gifts are obvious. R. G. LeTourneau, who made his home in Longview, Texas, was a well-known Christian of the last century. He appeared to have the spiritual gift of giving. He was known to give an exceptionally large percentage of his income to the Lord's work.

Paul describes the Church as "one body" and believers as "members in one body. My hands work differently than my feet which work differently than my eyes which ... So each believer's spiritual gift serves an important function in the Church. We do not even have to identify the spiritual gift that God has given us. That is why the lists of spiritual gifts in the Bible differ from each other and are not exhaustive. God expects us to be more than just a few pimple that pops up in church once a week or once a year or whenever and then disappears. I have a responsibility to serve my fellow believers in the church. I do this by using the abilities or talents God has given us.

"If prophesy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith." "In proportion to our faith" looks back to Rom. 12:3 which says "as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." For our spiritual gifts to work properly we must be walking in obedience to God's word, i.e. being in fellowship with God. But what does this gift of prophesy entail? The commentaries seem to be split. In 1 Cor. 12:24, Eph. 4:11, and Rom. 12:6-7 prophesy and teaching are always listed as separate gifts. Rom. 12:8 mentions the gift of exhortation as a separate gift. So I have a difficult time understanding prophesy as being other than proclaiming a new revelation from God. I have difficulty seeing it as another means of proclaiming messages about God. If I am correct, and prophesy is the communication of new revelations from God, then it was a temporary gift. This is what 1 Cor. 13:8-10 says, "But whether *there are* prophecies, they shall fail; ... for we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part will be done away." When "that which was perfect" came, the Canon of Scripture was complete, the gift of prophesy ceased.

Rom. 13:11-12. And *do* this, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

A lot of Bibles show Rom. 13:11 as the start of a new paragraph. Paul writes, "And *do* this." Do what? Is Paul referring to what he will say in the next sentence or is he talking about what he has just written. In the previous verses in Rom. 13, Paul commands us to obey governing authorities and pay taxes. He repeats the last five of the Ten Commandments. Then in Rom. 13:9-10 he writes, that all the commandments are summed up: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to its neighbor; therefore love *is* the fulfillment of the law." "And *do* this." He is repeating the command "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love is the mental attitude that characterizes a believer in Jesus Christ. I am even to love my enemies and those who have done great harm to me.

"Now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed." When we read the words "save" or "salvation" in the Bible, we need to stop and think about what the text is saying. The words basically mean "to deliver." The context indicates from what we are being delivered. Then as we look closely at salvation from a spiritual standpoint, we will find that the Bible refers to three phases of salvation. As a believer, I was saved in the past when I believed in Jesus Christ. As I walk in fellowship with the Lord in obedience to God's word, I am being saved from the power of sin in my life. If I disobey, I am returning to the slavery of my sinful nature (Rom. 6:6, "that we should no longer be slaves of sin"). In the future, when Jesus Christ returns for all believers during the time of the Church, we will be delivered or saved from the presence of sin. We could call these the three tenses of salvation. I was saved in the past from the penalty of sin. I am being saved now from the power of sin. I will be saved in the future from the presence of sin. Since I was saved when I first believed, and am currently being saved from the power of sin, this statement that "our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed" must be talking about the future return of Jesus Christ for His Church at the Rapture.

"The night is far spent, the day is at hand." Paul is saying that Jesus Christ could return at any moment. There is no prophetic event that has to come first. Beginning with Jesus' ascension to heaven, the entire remainder of the New Testament is written from the viewpoint that Jesus could return at any time. It has been two thousand years. It is easy for me to say this, but do I really think He could return before I eat breakfast this morning? If Jesus returns while the Swedish pancakes are still being heated in the pan, the house could burn down!

Since Jesus could return at any moment, what should I do? "Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light." Paul is using figures of speech. In the next couple of verses which I will look at another day, he gives some specifics. But "the works of darkness," are what Paul warns us against in Rom. 12:2, "do not be conformed to this world." These "works" are the way the world wants me to think. This is what our schools and universities are now teaching our children and grandchildren. They don't teach Biblical principles any longer. Eph. 6:10-17 talks about the "whole armor of God." 1 Thess. 5:8 is not as familiar. This verse says: "Let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation." When it says the "hope of salvation" Paul is talking about our future deliverance to heaven with Jesus Christ at the Rapture of the Church. I want to put on my "armor of light," the word of God. To "be sober" as Paul writes, is the wisdom that knowing God's word produces for application in my life.

Rom. 13:13-14. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts.

"Let us walk properly, as in the day." In the context "the day" of this verse is the return of Jesus Christ at the Rapture mentioned in Rom. 13:11-12. 1 Thess. 4:16 says of that day, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God." What do you want Christ to find you doing when you hear that shout and the trumpet blast? "Let us walk properly." Walking is a step by step process. Each step I take, each word I say, and each thought I have, need to be in accordance with what God tells me to do in His word.

Paul now moves to what I should not be doing. "Not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. This is a short "vice list" containing four overt sins and two mental attitude sins. The problem with the "vice lists" in the Bible is that we read them and agree that we should not do these things. Yes, they are sins, but they do not apply to me. Dr. Constable in his *Notes* has a short comment on this list. "The practices that he urged us to avoid here were common in Corinth, where Paul was when he wrote this epistle. He observed them constantly. Intemperance often leads to sexual sins ('promiscuity and debauchery'), which frequently results in interpersonal conflicts ('strife and jealousy')." These same sins were also common in Rome. The four overt sins were standard practices in the idol worship temples of that time. The early Christians in Rome and Corinth grew up as idol worshipers and had regularly practiced these sins. Old habits are hard to break. I am not a party person, so "revelry and drunkenness" is not one of my weaknesses. But I have other areas of weakness in my old man that are sinful. These I need to continually work on if I am to "walk properly," as Paul puts it here.

"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Even though Paul uses a figure of speech here likening our Christian walk to putting on our clothes each day, he is not telling us to wear a T-shirt emblazoned with a comment about Jesus. But I do need to make constant decisions to walk in obedience to Him. Each decision I make is like a step in my walk. Will I make that step in obedience to what God tells me to do in His word? Will my thoughts follow the principles God has given in the Bible, or will they be colored by the thinking of the unbelievers in the world around me?

"And make no provision for the flesh?" We all have proclivities to certain sins. I called them "areas of weakness" above. We should put up barriers in our lives rather providing opportunities for giving into potential temptations. This is a short verse that every believer should memorize and put into practice.



Lark Sparrow, near Falfurrias, Texas

Rom. 14:16-19. Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things *is* acceptable to God and approved by men. Therefore let us pursue the things *which make* for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

When I memorize verses, even memorizing 3 or 4 verses at a time, sometimes the context is not obvious. What is Paul talking about here? In Rom. 14 he is contrasting a weak or spiritually immature believer with a stronger or more mature believer. The weaker believer is not all that sure what he should or should not be doing and he may have old ideas that he learned as an unbeliever. In our youth group at the Baptist church we got the idea that we shouldn't drink, smoke, or dance. When we attended a church camp or retreat, the boys and the girls went swimming at different times. My parents were brought up in homes where you didn't work on Sundays and you didn't play cards. When I went to college in upper New York state, the people in the church I attended did not go to movies. For a believer who was raised in the Jewish faith, he must decide what to do about the strict dietary laws he followed under the Old Testament law. I have since learned that these come under the category Rom. 14:1 calls "doubtful things." Paul writes about them in Rom. 14 and 1 Cor. 8. What about our language and the use of four-letter words and expletives? Where should we draw the line? From the standpoint of God's word, none of the above are not specifically prohibited, but would come under the category of wisdom decisions.

In Rom. 14:2, Paul writes about believers who eat all things, but others are vegetarians. Rom. 14:5, some believers esteem "*one* day above another," others "every day alike." In 1 Cor. 8, the hot issue is food offered to idols. Should a believer eat it or not? Paul gives an important message to all of us in Rom. 14:10, "Why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." Paul also writes in Rom. 14:13 that we should "resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in *our* brother's way." Paul says to apply the principle of "love one another" and not to tempt another brother to violate his personal scruples. Then in Rom. 14:14, "Do not let your good be spoken of as evil." This command begins to make sense when we understand the context. The weaker believer is the one who will speak evil or judge the more mature believer when he sees him doing something that he would never do.

"For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." The commentaries appear split as to whether this refers to the future Kingdom promised to Israel or the sphere of this world in which we live. There will be eating and drinking in Israel's future Kingdom. What Paul is saying is that eating and drinking are not what the Kingdom is all about. What is important is our walk with God, being filled with the Holy Spirit which produces "righteousness and peace and joy" in our lives. We will also be considerate of the opinions and scruples of others.

"For he who serves Christ in these things ..." This includes not only the "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit," but also showing love to one another in not putting "a stumbling block or a cause to fall in *our* brother's way." For the weaker brother, it is also not judging another believer or showing contempt for him.

While my parents tended to be mild and soft-spoken I may have picked up some wild genes. I can be opinionated and outspoken at times. "A soft answer turns away wrath" (Prov. 15:1).

Rom. 15:4-7. For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning." The things written before were the Old Testament Scriptures. Even though what Paul writes here about the Old Testament also applies to the New Testament, I should not neglect studying the Old Testament. "That we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." When I read in the Old Testament how God kept His promises to His people back then, I can have hope (confident assurance) that God will fulfill His word for believers today. I also can learn a lot about Jesus Christ from the Old Testament and see how God fulfilled the prophecies regarding Israel's Messiah in Jesus Christ.

"Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus." Paul is continuing the discussion from Rom. 14 regarding the interaction between weaker and stronger believers. Being like-minded with other believers is not a unique idea. In Eph. 4:13-14, Paul spoke of the function of spiritual gifts in the Church. He wrote: "till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, ..." The Scriptures were "written for our learning," "till we all come to the unity of the faith." Paul prays that we would be "like-minded to one another." So even though I may have different ideas than other believers, what Paul wrote in Rom. 14:10 is still true. "Why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother?" What is the God's purpose for leaving us here?

"That you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." I am here to bring glory to God. This does not happen when I am at odds with other believers.

Jesus Christ is our great example. "Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God." Rom. 5:8. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." In the same way that Christ treated me with love and grace, I also need to do so with my fellow Christians.



Northern Bobwhite, Bee County, Texas

1 Cor. 2:1-5. And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

“And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.” The question that comes to my mind when I read this is: If I went to a church where Paul was the pastor, would I decide to continue to go there and listen to him? Or would I look for a church with a more eloquent preacher? If I were on my church's pastor search committee, would I even consider Paul as a pastoral candidate? I think too many people judge a church or a pastor on superficial reasons. How well does the pastor present his message. How friendly are the people there? This is such a beautiful church and facilities. These are what I mean by superficial matters. More important issues are: Does the content of the pastor's messages matter? What does the church believe in the way of the gospel, the Christian life, or even prophecy?

Paul did not have an easy time when he brought the gospel to Greece. He was imprisoned in Philippi (Acts 16). After Philippi Paul's missionary team went to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1). The antagonistic Jewish mob forced them to leave. They went to Berea. The Thessalonian troublemakers followed them; so they went to Athens (Acts 17:13). Paul preached his famous Mars Hill sermon in Athens to a bunch of Greek philosophers (Acts 17:19-31). Some mocked him, but others politely said, “We will hear you again” maybe (Acts 17:32). Next he came to Corinth (Acts 18:1). Paul admits in this letter to the Corinthians that he was not an eloquent speaker. It was his message that was important.

“I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” Jesus' death is the heart of the gospel message. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He died in my place, paying the penalty for my sins. His death is the basis for my entry into heaven for all eternity. All that is required of me is to believe in Jesus Christ and to accept this gift from God. God will then save me. It was the content of Paul's gospel message that was important, not his oratory skill.

“That your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” The power of the gospel message is delivered through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. John 16:8 says of the Holy Spirit, “He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” But God does not coerce people to believe. He gives us our free choice. God created angels and they had the ability to choose to obey God or to disobey. Satan chose to rebel against God and one-third of the angels followed him (Rev. 12:3-4). Satan must have been the original golden-tongued orator. Paul did not take after him.

Do our pastors teach the truth of God's word or are their messages laced with the “wisdom of men” and the latest ideas of the world? I remember my first Sunday at college when I decided to go to church on my own. I did not listen to suggestions of my new student friends (believers). The preacher talked about the farm problem in Iowa, not the Bible. I straightened myself out at lunch when I saw my new friends again. I asked, “Where did you say you were going to church”? The answer: “Meet us at The Arch at 5:30 and we can all go to the evening service.” I did that for four years.

1 Cor. 2:6-10. However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes the deep things of God.

Paul is still differentiating his message from the ideas that were popular subjects of debate by the Greek philosophers. These are the guys who in Acts 18:32 either mocked Paul or kind of shrugged their shoulders and said, "We will hear you again on this *matter*." So Paul tells the Corinthians, "we speak wisdom among those who are mature." Reading through the two Corinthian epistles, I would not call the original recipients of these letters as spiritually mature. They were messing up in many ways in their Christian lives. So is Paul sarcastically calling the Greek philosophers childish in their speculations about the world, or is he describing the believers in Corinth as mature in that they had believed the gospel message Paul taught? I think the answer is "Yes."

"We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery." Paul was not telling "who-done-it" stories. The New Testament uses the word "mystery" in the sense of a spiritual truth that was completely unknown in the Old Testament, but that God has now revealed to us in the New Testament. So what is this mystery truth unknown in the Old Testament? Christ, Israel's Messiah, God Himself, came in the form of true humanity, and His own people, God's chosen people, Israel, "have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death" (Acts 2:23). Jesus' death in my place paid the penalty for my sins. In hindsight, we can go back and read the prophecies of the Old Testament and see bits and pieces of this scenario. Paul loosely quotes Isa. 64:4, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, The things which God has prepared for those who love Him," This gospel of our salvation was a hidden mystery in the Old Testament. Going beyond the gospel and teaching about Israel's Messiah, the Church Age itself was totally unknown in the Old Testament.

This is "the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained (decreed or foreordained) before the ages for our glory." We will share in Christ's glory in eternity. Heb. 2:10 says, "For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering." The entire plan of God was foreordained and predetermined in eternity past. Nothing that happens is a surprise to God. God did not choose Israel thinking Israel would obey Him and then find out that Israel was a bad choice. So He had to abandon Israel and see if He can make it work through the Church. No, both Israel and the Church were in His plan from the beginning. God will fulfill His promises to Israel. I can be certain that my salvation is secure.



**Red Admiral, butterfly, Pedernales Falls State Park, Texas**

1 Cor. 2:11-14. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

When the Bible speaks of "spirit" the translators and Bible students face a challenge. The Greek word is used in multiple ways. The word is translated "wind" in John 3:8, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." When Jesus first appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, the disciples thought they were seeing a "ghost." (Luke 24:37) "But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit." Both the *NET Bible* and the *New International Version* translate the word here as "ghost." In 2 Thess. 2:8 the word is translated "breath." "And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth ...." When a person was said to be possessed by a demon, typically he is said to have an "unclean spirit." Mark 1:23 says, "There was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit." The word is also used for the Holy Spirit and is often used synonymously with the word "soul" for the immaterial part of people. Some Bible teachers also still teach that some Bible verses use the word "spirit" for an immaterial part of people created by God at salvation that is separate from the soul.

1 Cor. 2:11 says, "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him." This clearly speaks of the immaterial nature of people which could be either soul or spirit. Paul contrasts this with the things of God which only the Spirit of God knows. But then 1 Cor. 2:12 adds a second contrast: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God." Paul describes this "Spirit who is from God" in a different way than he does in the rest of the chapter. In verses 4 and 14 He says the Spirit "of God." Why did he change the preposition? Yes, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit when we believe in Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament believers did not have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. If this verse is saying that because we now have the Holy Spirit indwelling us, we can "know the things that have been freely given to us by God," how did believers in the Old Testament understand what God had revealed to them in His word and through the prophets? If we understand being "born again" in a literal sense of receiving a new spirit from God, then believers possess not only a body and soul, but body, soul and spirit. 1 Thess. 5:23 and Heb. 4:12 both distinguish between our soul and spirit. Jude 19 also does, but the translators translate the Greek word for "soulish" as "sensual" or "worldly." The verse says, "These are sensual (soulish) persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit" (or "not having spirit"). When we believe in Jesus Christ, God creates a new spirit in us. Now we can know the "things freely given to us by God."

Paul reinforces this understanding in 1 Cor. 2:14. "For the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God ..." The Greek word translated "natural man" or "unbeliever" are the Greek words for "soulish man." I need the human spirit God has given me to understand what He has given me in His word. The Holy Spirit also works within me when I am walking in fellowship with God, to help me understand, just as in the Old Testament, God's Spirit inspired the writers of God's word.

1 Cor. 4:3-5. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.

These verses are best understood in the light of chapter 3. In 1 Cor. 3:3 Paul points out the "envy, strife and divisions" that existed among the Corinthians. He calls the believers there "carnal" or "fleshly." With these sins of "envy, strife, and divisions" they were acting like unbelievers. Each person was choosing sides for his favorite church leader. 1 Cor. 3:5-6, we are "ministers through whom you believed ... but God gave the increase." He writes in verse 8, "each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor." Then in 1 Cor. 3:9-15, Paul tells us about the Judgment Seat of Christ." He mentions "reward" again in 1 Cor. 3:14, "If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward." That's the background for today's passage.

"It is a very small thing that I should be judged by you" or by anyone else. We aren't here to be fruit inspectors. It is not my responsibility to judge or evaluate another person's life, ministry, or walk with the Lord. "I do not even judge myself. For I know nothing against myself." I don't believe Paul is saying that he is sinless. That would be a contradiction to what he wrote in Rom. 7:14-23 and especially verse 19. "For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice." Paul is saying that he does not know of any unconfessed sin he has in his life. Does he have correct God honoring motives in his ministry? "He who judges me is the Lord." Paul wrote later in 2 Cor. 13:5, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves." Paul certainly practiced this in his life, which is why he could say, "I know nothing against myself."

While we are not to judge other believers, we do have a ministry responsibility that Paul speaks about in Gal. 6:1. "If a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted." This is a function of believers having love for one another. There is a lot packed into this verse. A "trespass" here is not what Paul calls "doubtful things" in Rom. 14:1, but a clear violation of what God commands us. This is also a command to believers who are "spiritual" and are acting in "gentleness." In his letters to them, Paul certainly did correct a lot of trespasses he saw the Corinthians committing.

"Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes." Paul is speaking of the Rapture which will be followed by the Judgment Seat of Christ where our lives as believers will be evaluated for potential rewards. This will be like a college or high school commencement. Everyone receives their diploma, i.e. eternal life. But some receive extra rewards, "cum laude." "Will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts." Paul does not seem to be talking about the overt acts of righteousness or ministry, but about the motives behind these actions. Were these the matters about which the Corinthians were judging Paul? It sure sounds like it. I am not competent to judge whether a person is a believer by how he lives his life or to judge another person's motives.

"Then each person's praise will come from God." Did I use the divine resources of God's word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in my life to produce "gold, silver, precious stones" (1 Cor. 3:12)? The "wood, hay, straw" in my life will go up in smoke.

1 Cor. 6:18-20. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

I could approach these verses with a twenty-first century mentality and write twenty-five words or less and not the usual seven hundred words of these devotionals. So here is what we should do or not do: Any form of sexual immorality is sin. Don't do it. Whatever I do, think, or say should be for the glory of God. These are valid applications and agree with other passages.

God has blessed me with some Bible teachers that like to dig deeper into the Bible text and find out why Paul wrote what he did, and how his original readers understood it. What was the mindset and worldview of these first century Corinthians? Once I find that out, then I will understand better what God wants me to know and do. Paul begins this discussion in 1 Cor. 6:12. "All things are lawful for me." Is Paul telling us that today we are under grace, and not under the Old Testament law? He wrote a lot about that in his letter to the Galatians. No, that is not what Paul is saying. In fact, Paul is simply repeating a slogan bandied about by the Corinthians that is derived from the Greek philosophers to whom they have been listening for years. The Greeks thought that there was an immaterial (or spiritual) part of man. But the immaterial was completely separate from the physical. The Corinthians believers had taken this false Greek idea and used it to justify their sinful actions. Paul's response to this Corinthian slogan is: "but all things are not helpful" (or profitable).

1 Cor. 6:13. "Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods." This is another Corinthian slogan. Since we eat when we get hungry and that is normal, when our sexual drive kicks in, we should run with it. This is the physical body doing its thing and the physical body is not important, but the spiritual is. Paul's answer is in 1 Cor. 6:14. "God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power." If the body is unimportant, why does God bother with resurrection?

"Every sin that a man does is outside the body." Paul quotes a third Greek slogan. Since in Greek dualism, sins are outside the body, they don't matter. Furthermore, these Corinthians had grown up in the idolatrous worship of the day that involved all forms of sexual immorality. These slogans allowed them to continue these sinful practices in the idol temples.

Paul reminds us that we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and our bodies are the God's temple. We are also redeemed. We are no longer slaves of sin, but slaves of righteousness (Rom. 6:18). Believers, you are to "glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." Both the body and the spirit are linked together and are important. I need to glorify God in my actions and in my thoughts.

The Corinthians were influenced by the thinking of the world around them. Our world thinks differently, and it still differs from what the Bible teaches. Is man basically good or is he sinful? Will taking away guns from people prevent murders? The world says if I don't like the sex with which I was born, change it. Should charity and helping the poor be left up to the individual choice of people or should the government determine who needs help? Are parents responsible for the education of their children or should the government determine what our children are taught? For me, I want to learn God's word, so I can discern between good and evil, and what is true and false (Heb. 5:14).

1 Cor. 10:11-13. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*.

1 Cor. 10:13 is a favorite memory verse of many people. It was one of the earliest verses I memorized when I became serious about Bible memory for a while when I was a teenager. Whatever temptations come my way, God has already provided me with "the way of escape." If I fail to say "No," it is my own fault.

As is my usual practice in memorizing Scripture, I try to memorize multiple verses so I know a bit of the context. So what are "all these things" and who is "them" of verse 11? In 1 Cor. 10:1-10 Paul reviews Israel's experience wandering in the wilderness for the forty years of the Exodus. Four particular sins were mentioned: Verse 7, "do not become idolators." Verse 8, "Let us not commit sexual immorality." Verse 9, "Let us not tempt (test) Christ." Verse 10, "Nor complain." Then in 1 Cor. 10:14, Paul writes, "Therefore, my beloved, flee from Idolatry." Paul has reached a conclusion of a subject he began in 1 Cor. 8:1, when he wrote about food sacrificed to idols. "All these things" were variations on the same failing. The people of Israel were looking at their present circumstances. Moses spent too long on the mountain and the people thought he was never coming back. There was no water to drink, so they complained. They were tired of eating the same manna every day. They were testing God and Christ by failing to trust God that He would keep His promises to bring them "to a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exo. 3:8).

So Paul writes to the Corinthians, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." The people of Israel had seen God's great deliverance from Pharaoh and his armies when God brought them through the Red Sea high and dry. But the Egyptian army was destroyed. How soon we forget! That's why I need to stay in God's word on a regular basis. I need to keep my mind focused on the Lord. We have examples throughout the Bible of even the greatest believers failing.

1 Cor. 8:4, "An idol is nothing in the world." 1 Cor. 10:25, "Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions." Even if this food has been sacrificed to an idol, you can eat it. The "idol is nothing." 1 Cor. 10:28, "But if anyone says to you, 'This was offered to idols,' do not eat it." In 2 Cor. 6:17 Paul writing again about the worship of idols, speaks of the principle of separation. "'Come out from among them And be separate,' says the Lord. 'Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.'" It seems to me that what Paul is saying is that it is better to stay away than to be involved with these unbelievers even on the periphery. When you do that, you are putting yourself in the way of temptation and may be enticed into greater participation in their sinful practices. This is what happened with Israel through much of their history and led to the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. The false religions of our day are different. We are inundated today with anti-Biblical ideas, in the classrooms of our schools and universities, on television, on the internet and from our friends. Do I know God's word well enough to discern what is God's truth? Heb. 5:14 defines spiritual maturity: "Solid food (of God's word) belongs to those who are of full age (mature), *that is* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised (through regular application) to discern both good and evil." Knowing and applying God's word is the best way to overcome temptation.

1 Cor. 11:27-34. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.

Paul is writing about how the Corinthian believers celebrated the Lord's Supper or Communion. More than any other of the New Testament books, the Corinthians presented more issues regarding the failures in their walk as believers in Jesus Christ. In these verses they were celebrating the Lord's Supper "in an unworthy manner." In churches which I attend and have attended previously, we have a moment of silent prayer at the beginning of the communion service. "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat ... This gives each person the opportunity to examine himself and then if necessary to confess any known sins to God. This restores fellowship with God so I can partake worthily.

The bread recalls Jesus' humanity. He was fully God, but also full humanity. He gave His life for us. The "cup" is a reminder that Jesus died in my place, paying the penalty for my sins, that I might receive the gift of eternal life from God. One thing I do when the elements are being passed is to quote or read Phil. 2:1-11 to myself. I find these verses a good reminder of Jesus' sacrifice.

But some of the Corinthians were not partaking in a worthy manner. "For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep." God was bringing divine discipline on these believers in the form of sickness and euphemistically "sleep." Now "sleep" does not mean they were nodding off during the pastor's sermon. Many Corinthians had died the sin unto death for this sin.

"If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged." After examining ourselves, when we find that we have sinned, we are to judge ourselves by confessing that sin (1 John 1:9). "But when we (believers) are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the (unbelieving) world. Unbelievers are not God's children. He is not going to bother to discipline them in this world, but withholds His final judgment for the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:11-15.

"Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another." 1 Cor. 11:21 gives a clue to what may have been going on in Corinth. "For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of *others*; and one is hungry and another is drunk." So it sounds like they were celebrating the Lord's Supper with a full meal, not just a broken cracker and small cup. And getting drunk! Were they trying to imitate the orgies accompanying the worship of Bacchus that they used to do before believing in Jesus Christ? Could they have been cutting into the serving line to get the best food before it got cold? Were they diving into their food even before saying grace? Whatever it was, they were not acting the way Paul says in 1 Cor. 14:40, "Let all things be done decently and in order."

The Lord's Supper pictures the gospel message. I was not saved because I knew the facts. God saved me when I believed that Jesus died in my place, paying the penalty for my sins. When I believed God gave me eternal life.

1 Cor. 15:1-5. Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.

The subject of 1 Cor. 15 is resurrection. While many Greek philosophers taught that the soul or spirit of man lives on after death, the idea of the resurrection of the body was too far-fetched for them. So in 1 Cor. 15:12. Paul asked the Corinthian believers, "Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?"

Starting the subject in 1 Cor. 15:1, Paul wrote, "brethren (believers), I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received." In the past when Paul had preached the gospel in Corinth, these people had believed. "And in which you stand." They believed in the past, and they continue to believe the gospel. Even though they have doubts and some are denying the resurrection, they are still saved. This denial of the resurrection affected their walk, but not their salvation.

Then in 1 Cor. 15:2, "by which you are saved." The *NET Bible* and *English Standard Version* translate this as "by which you are being saved." This is in contrast to the prior verse which says the Corinthians had received the gospel and were already saved. When we walk in obedience to God's word, we are being saved from the power of sin in our lives. This is similar to what Paul wrote in Rom. 6:5-6, "For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." The same power of God which raised Jesus from the dead has given us a new spirit, a new man, that we should no longer live under the domination of our old man. So I must continue to hold fast to God's word so that I can overcome my old man in my walk in fellowship with God.

Paul then reminds the Corinthians what he had already delivered to them: "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." That statement is the heart of the gospel message that we need to believe to receive our eternal salvation as a gift from God. "And that He was buried." Jesus' burial was evidence that He did die. "And that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve." Jesus' resurrection was substantiated by over 500 people who saw Him after His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:6).

My faith in Jesus Christ and God is not based on a lot of mystical fairy tales in the Bible and other ideas that come out of the imaginations of people. But it is tied to the historical accounts given in the Bible and supported by eye witnesses. Even the events of Creation in Gen. 1-2 were told by God to Adam and passed down from one generation to another until Moses put them into writing.

The believers to whom Paul was writing were still saved even though they rejected the resurrection. So knowing and believing the resurrection is not required to be saved. But it was always of first importance in Paul's teachings. Listening to the ideas of the world and not knowing God's word led to no spiritual growth and a lot of sin among the Corinthians. Had they believed in vain?

1 Cor. 15:12-14. Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty.

Paul is developing the subject that he began in 1 Cor. 15:1. The Corinthians have been taught that Christ was raised from the dead. Yet they had heard all their lives from well-known Greek philosophers that while the soul, the immaterial part of people, is immortal, the body itself is not. The body stands in the way of attaining the higher goal of the immortality of the soul. "But if there is no resurrection, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty." The Bible is not some morality play or extended version of *Aesop's Fables*, to get us to be good little boys and girls. Fortunately, the Greek philosophers have come and gone. If I had ever taken a course in philosophy, I am sure I would not have done well.

But I did grow up with a lot of ideas I heard in school and elsewhere that don't fit well with what the Bible teaches on many matters. I was taught that the world was billions of years old. In the early 1980s my oldest son and I visited colleges. We attended a lecture by a college professor and I learned about the Big Bang. It sounded interesting. Could this be the way God created the world? After World War Two the United Nations was formed to bring peace to the world and end war. The world is trying to create a utopic world without God. But Jesus said in Matt. 24:6, "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars ... but the end is not yet." In my school years, I walked to my elementary school. My junior high was a little further away, but I rode my bicycle with my violin strapped onto it, so I could play in the school orchestra. When I started high school we car-pooled with others in the neighborhood. Today we bus students all over town because of racial issues. Yes, we had wrong ideas about race when I was growing up. But in trying to solve these issues, things have gotten even worse. The truth from the Bible says that we are all one race. But Darwin's ideas on evolution say otherwise. Hitler's Holocaust was largely based on Darwin's evolution coupled with hatred of the Jews by German religious leaders of the past. As Jesus told His disciples in John 13:35, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Racial problems exist because of the failure of people to love one another.

Early on our colleges and universities were formed so that people could learn God's word. But today, they have changed all that and much of what is taught is the thinking of the world and anti-Biblical. In the grade schools I attended we had prayer. I received a Gideon New Testament at school when I was probably in the fourth grade. We sang hymns and Christian carols that mentioned Jesus, not a silly reindeer or a white Christmas.

I need to learn God's word, so I can discern between what is true and false in what I hear and read in this world. In each of Paul's letters to the Corinthians we have a key passage on the subject of the Judgment Seat of Christ. These believers in Corinth were not living like Christians ought to live. So it may have been apropos that Paul taught the subject to them.

Jesus Christ is alive today. He is coming back for us so that we can spend eternity with Him. My loved ones who have believed in Jesus Christ and have died, will also be resurrected. May Jesus return soon. If there is no resurrection, then all this is just another myth.

1 Cor. 15:20-22. But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

"Now Christ has risen from the dead." Paul again asserts the fact of Jesus' resurrection in order to confirm its importance to us. "In His resurrection Christ "has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." "Fallen asleep" is used as an idiom for those who have previously died. The word "firstfruits" does not mean much to us. But to those who studied the Old Testament Scriptures, which early Christians did, it had meaning. Lev. 23:10-11. "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.'" For the people of Israel to bring the first part of the harvest as an offering to God was an act of faith that they would be able to harvest the rest of the field. In that way they would be able to feed their families until next year's harvest. When we give an offering to the church or the Lord's work, is it out of what we haven't spent out of our last paycheck? Or do we give it from the paycheck we received on Friday before we have a chance to spend it on other things? To me, the latter sounds like giving my firstfruits as an offering to God. That is a fairly obvious application. But consider when the Jews were supposed to bring the firstfruits to the priest. "The day after the Sabbath." On the Jewish calendar that would be Sunday. Jesus' resurrection occurred on Sunday and Paul calls Jesus the firstfruits. When did Jesus die? He died on Friday which was the day the Jews celebrated the Passover. The Passover pictured Jesus' death.

"By man came death. Adam, the first man sinned. He brought both physical death and spiritual death to all of us. "By man came the resurrection of the dead." Jesus is the only person ever resurrected to this point. He is rightly called the "firstfruits." But because He was resurrected, we can have faith that we will also be resurrected. "Even so in Christ all shall be made alive."

Paul wrote in Rom. 5:12, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—" Col. 1:18 says of Christ: "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence." If Christ is "the firstborn from the dead," then there must be others born "from the dead" after him. That would be us. I can have confidence that God will fulfill His promise. I look forward to being "caught up together with them (all believers) in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:16-17). May it be not too much longer in the future.



**Questionmark, butterfly, near Mother Neff State Park, Texas**

1 Cor. 15:47-50. The first man *was* of the earth, *made* of dust; the second Man *is* the Lord from heaven. As *was* the *man* of dust, so also *are* those *who are made* of dust; and as *is* the heavenly *Man*, so also *are* those *who are* heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the *man* of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly *Man*. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.

Paul continues the contrast between Adam and Jesus Christ. "The first man (Adam) *was* of the earth, *made* of dust." He refers to Gen. 2:7 and Gen. 3:19. The latter verse says, "For dust you *are*. And to dust you shall return." Christ, "the second Man *is* the Lord from Heaven." Jesus as God has always existed. He had no beginning. Gen. 2:7 points us to how we each received our human life. "And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." This statement differs from how God created birds, animals, fish, and creeping things. Gen. 1:20-21, "Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth ... So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, ... and every winged bird according to its kind." Gen. 1:24, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth." God created these creatures as living creatures. The text does not say that God breathed into them "the breath of life." When God formed man of "the dust of the ground," from the chemicals, DNA, and everything else that physical life requires, God went a step further. He "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." I see this description as God making man in His image (Gen. 1:26). God gave soul life to Adam. We can procreate like all animal life, but our soul and spirit come from God. The immaterial part of our being which is in the image of God is a gift from God, not a result of procreation. That distinguishes mankind from animals.

"As *is* the heavenly *Man*, so also *are* those *who are* heavenly." We, as believers, are heavenly because we have been born again. We are a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). Eph. 4:23-25 says, "be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness." We are freed from slavery to our flesh, our old man, which was passed down to us from Adam when we were born. Paul wrote to the Galatians in Gal. 5:17, "For the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish." I have shown the "spirit" here as "spirit" because I see this as a battle going on between my old man and my new man. Paul commanded the Galatians in Gal. 5:13, "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, ..." It is my choice how I live. The Holy Spirit does not decide for me. The Holy Spirit teaches me through God's word what I should do, and leads me if I allow Him to do so.

"Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Paul introduces a subject he will expand in the following verses. My body, encumbered with the sinful nature passed down from Adam, cannot spend eternity in God's kingdom. "Corruption cannot inherit incorruption." Our physical bodies obey the natural laws of God, like the laws of thermodynamics. Our physical bodies are in the process of dying from the moment of birth. Since Adam's fall, all of creation has been running down like the batteries in our cell phones. Thermodynamics tells us that this world is running down. If this world had always existed, it would long ago have run down to an inert mass, all the universe's energy having been exhausted. The world would be at a temperature of Absolute Zero (-460 degrees F.). But God has other plans for us, and some wonderful promises in the remainder of this chapter.

1 Cor. 15:51-54. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

"Behold, I tell you a mystery." As Paul used the term, a "mystery" is a teaching from the Lord that had not previously been revealed. What Paul is writing to the Corinthians was entirely new. What the Corinthians had heard all their lives from the Greek philosophers is that the body is not important. When we die, the body is gone. But there was an immaterial part of people (we call it the soul) that will live on forever. Paul disagrees and tells us three things.

First, "we shall not all sleep." By that Paul says that not all believers are going to die. Something will happen: The trumpet will sound." 1 Thess. 4:16-17 explains what Paul is saying in more detail. "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." When Jesus returns at the Rapture, the believers who are alive are caught up together with those who have previously died to meet the Lord in the air. Paul told the Corinthians that the last trumpet will sound. He also told the Thessalonians that Christ returns "with the trumpet of God." Paul's second point is that He expected the Rapture to happen at any moment. There is no intervening prophecy that has to happen first.

Some Bible teachers confuse the "last trumpet" here with the seven trumpet judgments of Revelation. Dr. Constable's *Notes* quotes Dr. John Walvoord on this subject. "In Israel a trumpet sounded when the nation began its marches in the wilderness. Another trumpet sounded when they stopped marching, Each series would have a first trumpet and a last trumpet." Revelation 4-5, properly understood and correctly translated (which no English Bible does) has the church in heaven represented by the twenty-four elders. The trumpet judgments begin later in Rev. 8 during the time of the Tribulation which ends in the salvation of multitudes from Israel. So in 1 Cor. 15:52 Paul is speaking of the "last trumpet" for the Church. Jesus also told us about the Rapture in John 14:1-3.

The third thing Paul tells us is the "mystery" that "we shall all be changed." This is necessary because 1 Cor. 15:50 tells us "that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor can corruption inherit incorruption." So when this trumpet sounds the dead in Christ rise and we follow them. But we don't follow them in our dead or dying bodies. Our corruptible bodies put on an incorruptible body, which also happens to be an immortal body. Paul described this new "resurrection body" to the Corinthians again in 2 Cor. 5:1. "For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." He summarizes this "house not made with hands" in 2 Cor. 5:4, "that mortality may be swallowed up by life."

Prophecy was an important subject taught by all the New Testament writers. It is meant to be a comfort and an encouragement to us. God wants us to know what our future holds. Since Christ could return at any moment, Peter wrote 2 Pet. 3:11, "what manner *of persons* of person ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness." I have only a limited time to honor Christ in this life.

1 Cor. 15:55-58. "O Death, where *is* your sting? O Hades, where *is* your victory?" The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Paul finishes discussing resurrection. Death is not the end. Death is not victorious. The word "translated "victory" has the same root as the word translated elsewhere as "overcome." There is no sting in death. I was wearing a heavy jacket one time when I was out in the country. I picked up an old can which was upside down on a fence post not knowing that there was a wasp nest inside of it. Just one wasp! That wasp hit me on the shoulder and stung me through the heavy jacket, knocking me down. Unbelievers have nothing to gain and everything to fear in death. Not so, for the believer in Jesus Christ. Our resurrection overcomes death.

"Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Just as Jesus overcame death when He was resurrected, so we also will experience resurrection.

The last verse in this chapter is one I first memorized seventy years ago using The Navigators Topical Memory System. The verse sums up how I should live my life. Therefore." Is this a conclusion drawn from this chapter on resurrection? Dr. Constable's *Notes* includes Dr. G. Campbell Morgan's observation in a book I purchased sixty years ago. Dr. Morgan said Paul was wrapping up everything between 1 Cor. 1:9 and through 1 Cor. 15. The earlier verse Dr. Morgan quotes reads, "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." Dr. Constable wrote on 1 Cor. 1:9. "Fellowship is a matter of degree. ... Paul's major concern, in this epistle, was that they dealt with things that were limiting that fellowship. All of the problems in the Corinthian church, and its needs that Paul addressed, were hindrances to this fellowship. Christians have more or less fellowship with Christ to the extent that they trust and obey Him (cf. 1 John 1:3)." The latter verse reads: "that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." The Bible uses the word "fellowship" in the sense of sharing. We are sharing with God or working together for the common purpose of glorifying God.

So how should I live? "Be steadfast, immovable." Don't be swayed by false teaching of God's word. In the Corinthians' case it was those who deny Jesus' resurrection. Don't slip back into the lure of good food and the fun and games at the idol temples where you worshiped before believing in Jesus Christ. That was a Corinthian problem, but the world today has many attractions that are also sinful. "Always abounding in the work of the Lord." I can become so involved in the day to day demands of job, family, hobbies, pleasures, sports, working out and exercise, or whatever, that I neglect my fellowship with the Lord. That fellowship comes through prayer, being in God's word, ministering to other believers, and simply obeying what the Bible tells me to do. Heb. 10:24-25 commands us to "Consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." I am to "abound in the work of the Lord" which means ministering to other believers as well as my witness to unbelievers.

"Knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." "Vain" carries the idea of "empty." I don't want to walk away from the Judgment Seat of Christ empty handed! 1 Cor. 3:12-15 and 2 Cor. 5:10. *The Grace New Testament Commentary* cross-referenced these verses with 1 Cor. 15:58.

2 Cor. 1:3-4. Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

"Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Two other New Testament letters begin with this statement. Paul repeated it in Eph. 1:3. Blessed *be* ...Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus." It appears also in 1 Pet. 1:3 where it says of Jesus Christ: "who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Dr. Constable's *Notes* quotes another commentator who renders the word "Blessed" as "Adored." This puts a more contemporary emphasis on the word and shows the attitude we should have toward God. All three of these verses present us with important information for our Christian lives. Peter reminds us that we have been born again and that the resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us total confidence that we too will enjoy eternal life after our time in this world is completed. Paul tells the Ephesians that God has spiritual blessings for us in eternity.

In this introduction to 2 Corinthians, Paul speaks of one of the blessings we have as believers. God "comforts us in all our tribulation." Other translations replace the word "tribulation" with "affliction" or "trouble." Elsewhere the word is translated "hardships," "pressures," "distresses." Everybody in the world experiences these situations. How do we handle these problems? Even though evangelists may tell people that becoming a Christian will solve all problems, this is misleading. Paul wrote in 2 Tim. 3:12: "Yes, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." Believing in Jesus Christ may actually result in more problems from the world. God provides us with His word and the Holy Spirit to carry us through whatever may happen. 1 Cor. 10:13 is a familiar verse to many. It talks about being tempted and temptation. But the word means more than just temptation to overt sin. It refers to the trials we face in life. "No temptation (trial) has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted (tested) beyond what you are able, but with the temptation (testing) will make the way of escape that you may be able to bear it." I can handle the stresses and difficulties of life God's way or I can fall into sin and handle it my own way or look for a solution from the thinking of the world.

"God who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble." God allows us to continue to experience the pressures and problems of life so that we can learn to trust Him more. This requires that we know what God's word says, and that we apply it by faith. As we do that, we grow in our spiritual lives. Believers who have learned to handle their problems in a godly manner, now are able to help others in their hardships and difficulties.

I, as a believer in Jesus Christ, have a responsibility to minister in some way to other believers. Each of us has different responsibilities. As Paul wrote in Rom. 12:6, God has given each of us a gift "differing according to the grace that is given to us." Paul also wrote in Eph. 4:15-16, "but speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love." Being a part of Christ's church should be more than a one hour of the week nod to God activity.

2 Cor. 3:5-6. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency *is* from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves." We have all known people who go around trying to show everyone "How great I am." Now they may have good grounds for their bragging rights. Others not so much, but they go out of their way to make others think they are better than they actually are. In Paul's situation he had brought the gospel to Corinth. He was writing to believers in Jesus Christ who had come to faith through the ministry of Paul and his team. Paul could be patting himself on his back thinking how great an evangelist and Bible teacher he is. But in 1 Cor. 2:1-5 he admits his own inadequacies. In 1 Cor. 2:4-5 he said, "And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." Paul realizes that the success of his ministry is not from his own abilities, but through the spiritual gifts he had received from the Holy Spirit. In today's passage he adds, "Our sufficiency *is* from God."

As I look back over my life, I see many amazing things God has done for me to bring me to where I am now. My ideas about where to go to college were different from God's. He sent me to a college of which I had never heard. There he put me with a group of solid Christian believers who had a profound influence on me. When I started to get a little wild, as many college students often do, one of these friends came to me and suggested I settle down. He was operating under Gal. 6:1. I have had successes in business that apart from God, should not have happened.

Paul's humility in today's verses is not a false humility that some people try to put forth. Paul was a minister of the new covenant through the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul was a minister "not of the letter but of the spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." In uncapitalizing the first use of the word "spirit," I am following a comment in Dr. Constable's *Notes*, which he quotes from another commentator. He wrote: "Paul used 'Spirit' in this passage in a double sense. On the one hand, he contrasts the letter (exact wording) of the Old Covenant with the spirit (true intention) of the New Covenant. On the other hand, he contrasted the non-enabling, external words of the Old Covenant with the enabling, internal Holy Spirit of the New Covenant." The Bible I use also footnotes the first word "Spirit" with the alternate reading of "spirit." The nineteenth century *Darby Bible* also translates the words as "spirit ... Spirit."

"The letter kills." This "letter" is the old covenant, i.e. the Law God gave to Moses for Israel to follow. With its 613 commandments, it was impossible for Israel to keep the Law. It was a killer of a covenant. There is a lot of confusion about the new covenant and different understandings. Here is what *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* says. "The physical and national aspects of the New Covenant have not been appropriated to the church. Those are yet to be fulfilled in the Millennium. The church today shares in the soteriological aspects of that covenant, established by Christ's blood for all believers."

I don't need to toot my own horn. I learned a long time ago that whatever I do, there are others who can do it better. I am not here to receive the approbation of other people. I am here to serve the Lord. I need to know God's word so I can know what God's will is in any situation I face. As Paul said in 1 Cor. 4:5, At the end, "Then each one's praise will come from God." That is why I am here.

2 Cor. 4:13-15. And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present *us* with you. For all things *are* for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

"Since we have the same spirit of faith." Both Paul and the Corinthians, to whom he was writing, were believers in Jesus Christ. The word "Since" is drawing on what Paul had written in the immediately preceding verses. Including 2 Cor. 4:8-9 which says, "*We are* hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not shaken; struck down but not destroyed." Paul is talking about the suffering and hardships he endured in bringing the gospel and the word of God to others in his missionary journeys.

"I believed and therefore I spoke." Paul quotes Psa. 116:10 which is a psalm expressing the sufferings the psalmist had experienced. In Psa. 116:8 the psalmist wrote, "For you have delivered my soul from death, My eyes from tears, *And* my feet from falling." We live spoiled lives today. The problems and hardships we face do not come close to the difficult situations Paul and other believers faced in Bible times. "Therefore I spoke." Paul continued to follow the example of the psalmist and continue to teach wherever he went. His sufferings did not stand in the way of his ministry. Do I apply God's word to the difficult situations I face from time to time? Or do I react in sin?

"Knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present *us* with you." Again, we see the importance of Jesus' resurrection to Paul and the hope or confident assurance that it provided him to continue his ministry. Jesus promised His disciples in John 14:2-3, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also." We call this event the Rapture, in contrast to His Second Coming when Jesus returns and destroys the armies of the Antichrist. Rev. 19:11-21.

"All things are for your sakes." Paul's ministry was for the benefit of the Corinthians. "That grace, having spread through the many." Paul was carrying the gospel of grace to more and more people as he traveled throughout the ancient world.

Finally, Paul talks about the ultimate purpose for his sufferings and his ministry. "May cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God." The purpose is to bring glory to God. Even in difficulties and sufferings, I should give thanks to God. The tests I face are for me to show my faith in God. As the psalmist above said, God "delivered my (the psalmist's) soul from death." Whatever tests, trials, distresses I face, God has already provided the solution. It is up to me through prayer and the application of God's word to handle them God's way. I should not be solving my problems my own way or looking to the world's ideas.



Variegated Fritillary, butterfly, Beaumont, Texas

2 Cor. 4:16-18. Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

Paul finishes this chapter laying the groundwork for the next. "Therefore we do not lose heart." He began this chapter in 2 Cor. 4:1: "Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart." Paul is chaining his thoughts and discussion together with words like "Therefore." In 2 Cor. 2:6-9 he wrote, "made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant" ... "the ministry of death" ... "the ministry of the Spirit" ... "the ministry of condemnation" ... "the ministry of righteousness." In 2 Cor. 2:12 he described his ministry method, "we use great boldness of speech." But Paul faced opposition, persecution and suffering which he describes earlier in 2 Cor. 4. Paul is not discouraged. He continues ministering in the power of the Holy Spirit.

"Our outward man is perishing." Our physical bodies are wearing out. "Yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day." Believers are expected to utilize the divine resources God has provided. Through the Holy Spirit we are to "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col. 3:16, cf. Eph. 5:18-19). When we apply God's word to the challenges of this life, we grow spiritually, or as Paul says here, "the inward *man* is being renewed day by day."

"For our light affliction." All that we suffer in this life is just "light affliction" compared to what God has in store for us in eternity: "a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory." While all believers can look forward to eternal life with the Lord in eternity, those who have obeyed God and renewed their inward man day by day will receive eternal life more abundantly. John 10:10, Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." In the next chapter, 2 Cor. 5:10, Paul writes, "For we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

"For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which *are* not seen are eternal." Paul stated his case clearly. What is important in my life? Jesus speaking to His disciples in Matt. 6:19-21 said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also." The Christian life is more than keeping the Ten Commandments. Paul remained faithful in his ministry through a lot of pressures and suffering. Is my faith strong enough to do the same"?



Northern Pintail, Fort Worth, Texas

2 Cor. 5:1-4. For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.

These first few verses contain a magnificent promise for us. But it has produced multiple interpretations. None of which we can be pulpit thumping as to which is correct. First, we know from several passages including 1 Cor. 15:52, that when Jesus returns for us in the Rapture that we will be resurrected with what is called a "resurrection body." "For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed." The general understanding is that we receive our resurrection body at the Rapture. So what happens when we die? Here in 2 Cor. 5:1, Paul seems to be talking about what happens when we die. "We have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." This could be our "resurrection body," except for the timing as to when we receive it. Numerous Bible teachers (Chafer, Walvoord, and others) have suggested that Paul is referring here to an "interim body" that we receive at death and will possess until 1 Thess. 4:16 says, "the dead in Christ will rise first." At the Rapture is when we receive our resurrection body. A third approach is to not take the references in this verse to "earthly house," "tent," "building from God," and "house not made with hands" as figures of speech, but literally. This position links words to our "mansion" in heaven in John 14:2. Dr. Constable's *Notes* quotes Dr. William D. T. Shedd's summary of the Reformed view, "that the intermediate state is Heaven without the body." My observation is that Paul is not clear as to what he had in mind. To me, these ideas are more or less best guesses, any of which could be correct.

When I took classes at the College of Biblical Studies, Houston, one of my professors commented, in passing, on an additional view that I have heard nowhere else. When only one person has his own idea of a Biblical subject, sometimes referred to as a "breakthrough," that is a red flag that it may be a wild Trojan horse of false teaching. In this case, Dr. Ray C. Stedman gave a solution in *Authentic Christianity* in 1975. This is my summary of what he took seven pages to explain. Eternity is timeless (although there is a sequence of events, even in eternity). Eternity and time are two separate creations of God. We die and our soul and spirit immediately enter into eternity. We are immediately resurrected in the Rapture and caught up to heaven "And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17). I have heard no one else teach this. My professor loaned me Dr. Stedman's book to read. My professor only presented the idea as an interesting solution to this problem passage. To me, it resolves the issues with the other interpretations. There is no need for an interim body. We are not dis-embodied spirits inhabiting some mansion or dwelling for seven years in heaven. We die and we are caught up instantly to the clouds to meet Jesus in the air. It may be just another "best guess."

The sum and substance of these verses, 2 Cor. 5:1-4 is that our mortal bodies do wear out. We will die. Yes, we will receive a "resurrection body" by God's grace after we die. This resurrection body will be "eternal in the heavens." It will be incorruptible, immortal. It is like the body Jesus possessed after he rose from the dead. He could pass through walls, move from place to place without an elapse of time, eat and drink, talk and think, and everything else He did during those forty days prior to His ascension. When I see this stuff in the Bible, my promised eternity with God takes on new meaning.

2 Cor. 5:5-9. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing *is* God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So *we are* always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.

These verses in 2 Corinthians are about the future we will have in eternity. "Now He who has prepared us for this very thing *is* God." God prepared us by saving us when we believed. Giving us the Holy Spirit is like a down payment or earnest money that God will fulfill His promises. Jesus Christ will return for us and we will spend eternity with Him in our resurrection bodies. Our future resurrection bodies will be immortal, incorruptible, and they will never decay. Just as Jesus was recognizable to His disciples and the others that saw Him after His resurrection, we should be able to recognize our family and friends in eternity.

"Knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight." I was saved through faith. Now, God wants me to walk by faith. Do I truly believe what God tells me in His word? To believe it, I must first learn it.

"We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." This is similar to a popular memory verse Paul wrote in Phil. 1:21. "For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain." I, too, can have this confidence, if I know, understand, and believe what Paul is saying in 2 Corinthians.

"Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him." Paul used the word translated here as "well pleasing" eight times in his letters, and the writer of Hebrews used it once. Paul used the word in Rom. 12:2 where it is translated "acceptable." "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable

and perfect will of God." If I want to know and to do God's will (called here "that good and acceptable and perfect will"), then I need to renew my mind to think God's way through His word. Do I point my life toward the target of being well pleasing to God? Or do I seek to please myself or my friends and neighbors or whomever I run into in this world?



Green Jay, Normanna, Texas

2 Cor. 5:10. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

A little over thirty years ago, my wife and I were visiting relatives in another state. We attended church with them. The pastor (I will call him, Dr. "P") was speaking about 2 Cor. 5:1-10. When he came to verse 10, what he said did not make sense to me. What did make sense, was that I learned from him what some churches mean by the phrase, "perseverance of the saints." I had always thought of it from the viewpoint of the Baptist church in which I grew up which was "once saved, always saved." Others refer to this as the "eternal security" of the believer. What Dr. "P" taught me about "perseverance of the saints" is that if you are truly a believer in Jesus Christ, you will demonstrate this by a life of good works. If you don't have enough good works in your life, then you don't have the right kind of faith. But this makes works a post-requisite for salvation.

When Dr. "P" came to 2 Cor. 5:10, he did not differentiate the Judgment Seat of Christ from the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:11-15. In the Great White Throne Judgment, the dead stand before God. The Book of Life is opened. The names of the dead are not found written in it, so the books of works are opened. The dead are then judged according to their works as written in the books of works. Their works do not measure up to the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, and all the dead are cast into the Lake of Fire. The dead are not judged for their sins, but for their works. Jesus died on the cross paying the penalty for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:1-2). The dead are judged according to their works which are not good enough to get them into eternity with God.

The Judgment Seat of Christ, however, is different. Here, all believers, who are now in their resurrection bodies, stand before Christ. He will judge or evaluate each person's life, "according to what he has done, whether good or bad." Dr. Constable's *Notes* says this of the word "bad." "The Greek word translated bad really means worthless. The idea is not that God will reward us for the good things we did and punish us for the worthless things we did. Rather He will reward us for the worthwhile things we did and not reward us for the worthless things we did. The worthwhile things are those that contribute to the advancement of God's mission and glory in the world. Worthless deeds are those that make no contribution to the fulfillment of God's good purposes." Again, when Paul writes about the "bad" or "worthless," he is not talking about our sins. Jesus paid the penalty for our sins in His death. God is just. His judgments are fair. No one need to be concerned that there will be double jeopardy for sins in God's courtroom. The idea of no double jeopardy came from God, long before it was ever established in human courts.

When the Bible speaks of believers receiving crowns or ruling with Christ in some way, it is speaking of the potential of rewards to be received at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Like a college graduation, we all receive a diploma, eternal life. But a few receive additional awards, dean's list or *summa cum laude*. At the Judgment Seat of Christ these additional awards are crowns or positions of rulership. As Jesus said to His disciples in Matt. 19:28, "When the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

We are saved through faith. We believe and God saves us. When God saved me, He did not require anything other than my faith. He does not require me to do works after He saved me. But I am not off the hook. God does expect good works from me. If I do well, He may surprise me with a reward.

2 Cor. 5:11-15. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences. For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have *an answer* for those who boast in appearance and not in heart. For if we are beside ourselves, *it is* for God; or if we are of sound mind, *it is* for you. For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

"Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord." The note in the *Holman Christian Standard Bible* explains the word translated here as "terror" and elsewhere as "fear." The note reads, "No single English word conveys every aspect of the word *fear* in this phrase. The meaning includes worshipful submission, reverential awe, and obedient respect to the covenant-keeping God of Israel." We don't like to think of God in terms of fear or terror. We tend to think of Him in a Hollywoodized version of love. Paul had just written about the Judgment Seat of Christ. With this in mind he says, "we persuade men." He gave them the gospel so that they could believe in Jesus Christ and be saved.

In these verses Paul is defending himself and his ministry. Apparently, there were some in Corinth who were challenging Paul's authority and message. "He writes, "We are well known to God." God knows our motives. God also knows that Paul and those with him were teaching correctly. Those who had believed in Jesus Christ through Paul's ministry also knew Paul was telling the truth. "I also trust are well known in your consciences."

"We do not commend ourselves again to you." Paul is not repeating his qualifications. He would leave his defense to those who previously had heard him teach. "But give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have *an answer* for those who boast in appearance and not in heart." Behind Paul's defense (or lack of it) and his critics lies the issue of motive. Paul's motive is the fear and respect for God and his realization that he will one day stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. But what is in the hearts of his critics? They may be well-dressed and talk a good game. God knows their motives.

"If we are beside ourselves, *it is* for God." Paul's critics were saying that Paul had lost his senses. This statement takes the position that if the critics are correct and Paul has lost his marbles, even so, Paul's preaching is for God's service. Paul was preaching the message that God wanted the Corinthians to hear. On the other hand, assuming Paul was speaking the rational truth, he was doing so for the benefit of his hearers.

"For the love of Christ compels us." Paul again states his motive and the driving force behind his ministry. "That if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again." Paul spells out the gospel message which he preached. Christ died for every person in the world, because we are all born dead to God. We were born dead in the sense that we were born separated from God. But I am now a believer in Jesus Christ. God has saved me. Just as Jesus was raised from the grave, I also will be resurrected in a new body. Now I should no longer live for myself, but I should do as Paul did. Am I compelled by the love of Christ? Do I live in fear and respect for God, knowing that my actions and thoughts are all known to God and will be evaluated by Christ, the Judge?

2 Cor. 5:16-17. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him thus* no longer. Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

What did Paul mean when he wrote, "we regard no one according to the flesh"? I think he gave us a hint in 2 Cor. 5:12 when he wrote of those who were criticizing his ministry, "that you may have *an answer* for those who boast in appearance and not in heart." Who are the people whom we admire in this world? Is there a great singer or actor or actress or a sports hero or political figure whom you would like to emulate? Perhaps you have a successful business person among your acquaintances whose favor you want to curry because it might help you advance in your profession. The *Grace New Testament Commentary* puts it this way. "Worldly standards, class distinctions, economic standing, political power, educational degrees, and racial differences no longer meant anything to the apostle." As Gal. 3:28 says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." I need to "Turn my eyes on Jesus."

Then Paul tells us to whom He does look up. "Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him thus* no longer." Paul is not claiming that he had met Jesus. Paul could well have been in Jerusalem and Judea during the time of Jesus' ministry. But nowhere are we told that Paul had seen or heard Him in person. Paul is saying that previously before Paul believed in Jesus Christ, that He had regarded what was being said about Jesus as false. He thought of Jesus from the same perspective as the other Pharisees and Jewish leaders who condemned Jesus to death. Jesus was not Israel's Messiah. He was not God. He was born outside of wedlock to an uneducated working class carpenter's wife-to-be. Jesus' miracles were a lot of magic tricks. To the extent there was any reality in them, they were done under the power of Satan (Beelzebub, Matt. 12:27). That was the thinking of the flesh or of the world in Paul's day. Today, the ideas of our world also deny the truth God has revealed to us in His word.

"Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation." The word "creation" is not a figure of speech. Nineteen out of the twenty times the word is used in the New Testament it refers to the creative acts of God. The twentieth use refers to the laws or regulations that people create to govern their activities. As Jesus told Nicodemus, "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Just because we have this new creation does not mean that we will live the way we should. As Paul wrote in Gal. 3:17, "For the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary to one another so that you do not do the things that you wish." (Note: I have uncapitalized the words "spirit.") We still have our old man who wants to live in the old sinful ways. Paul said in Rom. 6:6, "Our old man has been crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." Paul said "that we should no longer be slaves of sin." He did not say that we will no longer ..."

In Gal. 5:16 Paul commands us to "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh." When the Bible gives us a command, we have a choice. Will I choose to take advantage of the power of the Holy Spirit to learn God's word and then to obey it, so I can "walk in the Spirit." The alternative is to continue my former sinful ways and to "fulfill the lusts of the flesh." This is an ongoing process that needs to continue as long as I live.

2 Cor. 5:18-19. Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

"Reconciliation" is one of those six syllable Bible words that we don't use that often in day to day conversation. Therefore, it is not easy for us to understand. *The Grace New Testament Commentary* explains it this way: "Reconciliation means the person's enmity toward God is removed by Jesus' death on the cross." Paul uses the word elsewhere. Col. 1:20, "and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross." Dr. Constable's *Notes* points out an amazing aspect of reconciliation that I don't think I have ever heard. "God has brought everyone into a savable relation to Himself by sending His Son who paid the penalty for sin, which separates people from God. The fact that God has reconciled everyone does not mean that everyone is thereby correctly related to Him however. People still need to respond to the offer of salvation by believing the gospel in order to receive justification. ... Reconciliation removes a barrier to our salvation, but it does not by itself accomplish our salvation." Reconciliation removes the sin barrier that exists between all people and God because of Adam's sin.

Who is reconciled? We are reconciled. God is not reconciled. Reconciliation means that our position before God has changed. God is immutable. He never changes. It is easy to turn the term around. I have heard a preacher do it and say that "God is reconciled." No, it is our position before God that is changed. Reconciliation removes the issue of our sin, making salvation possible. Christ died on the cross in our place. He paid the penalty for everyone's sin. As 2 Cor. 5:19 says, God is no longer imputing our trespasses to us. But because the sin barrier is gone, does not qualify me for spending eternity with God. I still need Jesus' perfect righteousness. When I believed, God imputed Jesus' righteousness to me. That is what the word "justification" means that Dr. Constable mentioned above. I was also born again, which is another work of God, giving me eternal life.

Since I have been reconciled, what does God want me to do? First, He wanted me to trust in Jesus Christ and his death in order to receive eternal life, and to accept the gift of the forgiveness of my sins. Now, that I have done that, He has given me the ministry of reconciliation. The ministry of reconciliation is telling others what Christ has done for me. Dr. Constable's *Notes* quotes Dr. J. Vernon McGee about reconciliation. "All the religions of the world say, 'Do, do, do.' The gospel says, 'Done.'" The gospel is as Paul says in today's verses, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them." The word of reconciliation is not telling others what they have to do to live a life of good works. God does not ask for us to do any work for salvation. Nor do our works after salvation prove that we really believed and are saved. As Paul told the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:31, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." I believed and God saved me. God did all the work of my salvation.



**Black Skimmer, Texas City, Texas**

2 Cor. 5:20-21. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you (people)* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

When I was growing up, our Baptist church had youth groups, one for boys and one for girls. The girls group was called Girls Auxiliary (GAs) and the boys, Royal Ambassadors (RAs). 2 Cor. 5:20 was the theme verse for the Royal Ambassadors. Two generations later, one of my nephews was a group leader in his church's RA chapter. Of course, I memorized this verse ("Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ") at the age of nine, when I was in the RAs. I had no idea what the word meant. Now I know that the definition of an ambassador is one who "acts as an authorized representative of one sovereign ruler or country to another." The only other time the word is used in the New Testament is in Eph. 6:19-20, where Paul asked for prayer "that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains." Our Sovereign is Jesus Christ. We are to represent Him to the unbelieving world and speak the gospel plainly. Paul was in prison in Rome when he wrote the letter to the Ephesians. As he tells us in Phil. 1:13, "It has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ." Wherever Paul went, he told people about Jesus Christ.

Most of our Bibles read "we implore (plead, beg, beseech) *you*." The word "*you*" is in italics because the word is not in the Greek text. The translators have inserted it for better reading in English. But Paul was writing to believers. He was not pleading with these believing Corinthians to be saved again. So many commentators replace "*you*" with "*people*" which would include the unbelievers to whom Paul was proclaiming the gospel as an ambassador. Paul's message was: "be reconciled to God." Even though Christ's death on the cross paid the penalty for every person's sins and removed the sin barrier between us and God (reconciliation), it is up to each person to appropriate (accept the gift of) the forgiveness of sins and to be reconciled to God by believing in Jesus Christ.

"For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us." Jesus did not become a sinner when he bore our sins on the cross. God imputed our sins to Jesus, just as Adam's sin was imputed to us when we were born. Now because Adam's sin was imputed to us at the moment of birth, the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ can be imputed to those who believe in Jesus Christ.

How do we "become the righteousness of God in Him"? Believers receive Jesus' perfect righteousness when God gives it to us. He credits it to our account as it were. It is a gift. There is no way that my personal righteousness can ever equal that of Jesus Christ. My life of righteous living is not the evidence that God has saved me. Neither are my failures to live righteously evidence that I do not have the right kind of faith. I know that God has saved me because God promised that when I believe in Jesus Christ He would save me. The first verse I memorized using The Navigators Topical Memory System was on "assurance of salvation," 1 John 5:11-12. "And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."

God expects me to be a good ambassador for Him. I need to pray for boldness in my witness and for opportunities to speak to people who want to hear the gospel.

2 Cor. 6:16-18. And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among *them*. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty."

"For you (or we) are the temple of the living God." Is the "temple of God", mentioned here, the Church or is it each individual believer? Bible teachers seem to be split on their understanding. 2 Cor. 6:14 says, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers." Verse 15 adds, " Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?" Verse 14 is often applied as a command for a believer not to marry an unbeliever. That is certainly a correct principle and is supported by other Bible passages. In the past I had a pastor who also applied it to business partnerships between believers and unbelievers. This gave me a challenge when I had the opportunity to join up with three Jewish unbelievers in a business venture. I discussed it with my parents and with a believing uncle. I went ahead and for ten years was business partners with my three Jewish friends. They were men of integrity and we stood together through some difficult trials. The difference between a marriage relationship and business partnership from Biblical considerations is significant. The Bible permits only a few conditions for ending a marriage through divorce. Typically, in entering a business partnership the parties will agree on the conditions for terminating the relationship. As long as you stick with the agreement, you are not disobeying God. In this case I expected to receive a financial nest-egg on which I could fall back if the business arrangement did not work out. I would not be tied with these unbelieving partners because of financial concerns. Then the trials began. Two years into the partnership, the economy was in recession. The financial reserve was gone and the business itself also was in trouble having lost ninety percent of its value. This was kind of a double whammy. God allows these kinds of trials and tests to happen to His children. It took me several months of sleepless nights trying to find my own solution. Finally, I had no choice but to let go and to let the Lord solve the problem. He did so in ways that my unbelieving partners never recognized as the hand of God. That was fifty years ago.

So I take it that we as individual believers "are the temple of the living God." The "living God" is the resurrected Jesus Christ who indwells us along with the other members of the Godhead. Why does Paul mention the temple? Before the Corinthians became believers in Jesus Christ, they had worshiped the Greek idolatrous fertility cults. These religious cults promised wealth and prosperity to the participants. When Paul told the Corinthians in 2 Cor. 2:14, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers," was he telling them not to be involved with the temple prostitutes in the idol cults? In 2 Cor. 6:17, he quotes Isa. 52:11 "where God called to His people to depart from Babylon and its idolatry" (quoting Dr. Constable's *Notes*). Verse 17 says, "Come out from among them, And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." He was telling them, "You are believers in Jesus Christ. It is time to stop visiting these idol temples."

Today we know better. Idols are nothing. We have elevated science and the educated ideas of the world above God's word. We have churches and alleged Bible teachers who allegorize what the Bible says. We have churches that rely on the traditions of the fathers. It is a true statement that "We stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before." We learn from them and benefit from what they have taught. But I must be careful to understand what they say from a Biblical viewpoint says, and not just what some church father thought the Bible said.

2 Cor. 7:8-11. For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, *what* clearing of yourselves, *what* indignation, *what* fear, *what* vehement desire, *what* zeal, *what* vindication! In all *things* you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

Paul is following up on what he previously wrote. In 1 Cor. 5:1 he said, "It is actually reported *that there is* sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles, that a man has his father's wife!" While we know that sexual immorality is wrong, this language does not give a clear picture of what was going on. The general understanding is that this believer was having an affair with his stepmother. Even the immoral unbelieving Greeks were shocked by this affair. Paul tells the Corinthian church that they need to put this person out of the church. Which they did. But then the man stopped the affair with his stepmother, and the church did not let him back into their fellowship.

Now in 2 Corinthians Paul writes, "For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it." Paul had previously written a very harsh letter to them and he wasn't sure that he should have done it. But the letter had its desired effect. "Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance." Paul's letter had made the Corinthians "sorry in a godly manner." They repented in the sense that they changed their mind about not letting the man back into the church after he had stopped the affair with his stepmother. Paul said that he regretted having to send the letter in the first place. But when he realized that it was needed and the right thing to do, he did not regret it. Paul did not change his mind about sending the letter. He did not repent.

"For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you may suffer loss from us in nothing." Most commentaries do not address what this possible "loss" is. The *Word Biblical Commentary* presents three options. The two that sound more likely to me are (1) loss of reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ; and (2) divine discipline during this life. Paul may have had both in view.

"For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation." After reading Paul's earlier letter, the Corinthians were sorry enough that they changed their minds and brought the formerly sinning man back into their fellowship. We know the "sorrow" was separate from the repentance since Paul presents repentance as the result. The Corinthians did not need to regret having allowed the man back into the church. Salvation here is not the eternal salvation of the Corinthians since they were already believers. This refers to their spiritual growth that resulted from their correct application of Paul's teaching. The failure to obey and the "sorrow of the world," would produce death. Not eternal condemnation in the Lake of Fire, but separation from fellowship of God while living.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul did not have much to say about the Corinthians that was good. But now he writes, "in all *things* you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter." The Corinthians appear to have turned the corner and are beginning to progress spiritually. I also can progress spiritually as I learn God's word and apply it to all the challenges I face in life.

2 Cor. 8:7-9. But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also. I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

When I read or memorize a couple of verses from the Bible, it is sometimes difficult to know what the subject is that is being discussed. The verses sound good, but what is Paul talking about? What is “this grace” in which I should abound? At the time Paul wrote this second letter to the Corinthians, the believers in Jerusalem were going through intense suffering. Paul was collecting a monetary gift to take to Jerusalem to help the believers there. In 2 Cor. 8:1-2, he mentions the Macedonians of which Philippi was a major city. “Brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.” Paul is saying that the Macedonians were not that well off financially, but they gave generously. The Corinthians should follow this example.

“But as you abound in everything.” Compared to the Macedonians, the Corinthians were doing better. In fact, looking at this verse, the Corinthian church must have made good progress in straightening itself out from where they were when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. For they were abounding “in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us.” But their financial support from the standpoint of giving was lacking. So he adds: “see that you abound in this grace also.”

“I speak not by commandment.” Paul will explain this more in 2 Cor. 9:7, “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” In the Old Testament giving was built into the commandments of the Law God gave through Moses. The Law required the people of Israel to give two tithes of their produce every year and a third tithe every third year. They also were to give the firstfruits and to give for the sacrifices in the temple. Somewhere in the early church, the church fathers imported the Old Testament idea of tithing into the church as a standard for Christian giving. But we are not under the Old Testament Law. In the New Testament, even though we are told to support those who minister to us, the amount we give is not mandatory. Every believer is to give as he purposes or determines before God (“as he purposes in his heart”).

In today's verses Paul uses the Macedonians who were not that well off to encourage the Corinthians who were doing better financially to give. Then in 2 Cor. 8:9 Paul writes about Jesus Christ, “though He was rich, yet for your sakes, He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” Paul uses the two rich and poor examples as an encouragement to the Corinthians to give. I, as a Christian, whether rich and poor, should give for God's work. Remember what Paul wrote in Gal. 6:6, “Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.”

A basic money management principle is not to spend more money than you make. When you receive a paycheck, immediately set aside a portion for savings and a portion for giving to the Lord. Look at it from the standpoint of giving your firstfruits to the Lord. For Israel, giving the firstfruits was an act of faith that God would provide the second fruits with which he could feed his family for the rest of the year. My giving should not be what may be left at the end of the pay period.

2 Cor. 9:6-8. But this / say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

Paul is still on the subject of giving. 2 Cor. 9:8 expresses what one commentator called "the law of the harvest." "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." This principle appears in several places in the Bible. Think of it this way. If you were a farmer in the ancient world, you plowed your field and planted the seed. The wheat or barley grew and you harvested it. During the ensuing months, you used all the harvest to keep bread on the table. When the time comes to plow and sow more seed, you don't have any left. You have a problem. No seed and no money. Out of each harvest, you know that you have to set aside enough seed to plant next year. Reminds me of a basic principle of money management that works even today. When you receive a paycheck, set aside a portion for savings and for giving to the Lord.

Paul is using this "law of the harvest" as an illustration that God expects us to give for the Lord's work. Another commentator said this does not teach "prosperity theology." "Give till it hurts" kind of thing and God will multiply it back to you with material blessings. This is an important passage. I don't want to turn it into a circus carnival. The "law of the harvest" says that if we give to the Lord's work in obedience to His commands, He will bless us in return. We may not see those blessings until we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. We serve a just God. He knows what we do for Him.

While in the Old Testament giving in the form of tithes was commanded, today we have no such commandment from God. Giving is a decision each believer needs to be make personally. When we give, we should remember the "law of the harvest." The idea is to be a cheerful giver, which some preachers get carried away transliterating the Greek word and call it "hilarious giving." Wuest's *Expanded Translation* explains it well by saying, "a cheerful, ready giver." A believer is not to give because someone twisted his arm. I tend to look away when someone asks me to give by a given date because some big donor has made a matching gift. If I give my ten dollars, this other giver will also give ten dollars. That is gimmick giving. If this is a genuine proposal, then the other donor has put strings on his gift in order to try to coerce giving from others. Then there are the tear-jerking presentations asking for money. None of these techniques appear to me to meet the test Paul gives.

How much to give is a wisdom decision on the part of every believer. We need to keep 1 Tim. 5:8 in mind: "If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." God's promise to believers who give, "God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work." The Philippian church helped Paul financially. Paul wrote in his thank you letter, Phil. 1:6, "being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." The good work that God began in the Philippians was the gifts that they made to Paul. God provides for me so that I can give, and He keeps providing. I need to use the money God provides wisely, and not to squander it unnecessarily.

2 Cor. 10:3-6. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

As I read through this passage, it reminded me of a song in a movie from sixty years ago. "Ya got trouble (in River City)." This is what the faithful believers were dealing with in Corinth and what Paul intended to correct when he returns in the future. But the trouble was not in the city of Corinth, but there in the church. Paul had said in 2 Cor. 10:2 of these troublemakers, "who think of us as if we walked in the flesh." They were tearing down Paul's ministry and misleading the church in Corinth.

Paul's response in verse 4, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh." Paul uses the power of the Holy Spirit to write the word of God. He is a master in his choice and usage of words. He uses the word "flesh" three times in two verses. This is a common word with a dozen of so different nuances of meaning in the Bible. Paul uses it here in two different nuances. He was accused by these troublemakers of walking in the flesh of his old man, or sin nature. His teaching is false. Paul then admits, "Sure, I am still walking around in my physical body. But don't expect my defense to be from a human perspective." At least, that is my paraphrase of what he is saying.

"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal (fleshly. Same word, but in a different form) but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds." Paul has the word of God and the Holy Spirit on His side. "Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God." Paul has taught the Corinthians, both in person and by at least four letters of which we have two in our Bibles. He is asking the faithful believers in the Corinthian church to recall what Paul has already taught and to stand up against these trouble-making false teachers.

"Bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." We hear a lot against overt sins and also on verbal sins. But we also do a lot of sinning in the way we think. If I can direct my thinking toward obedience to God's commands, I would miss out on a lot of overt sin and sins of the tongue. Rom. 12:2 speaks about the way I am to think: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." I have to know and learn God's word if I want to renew my mind and bring "every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

"And being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled." Some translations read "when your obedience is complete." Paul expects to return to Corinth to set things straight. That is what he means when he writes that he is "ready to punish all disobedience." But he does not plan on returning immediately. First, he wants to return to Jerusalem with an offering for the suffering believers there. Meanwhile, Paul wants the faithful believers in Corinth to defend his ministry and teaching. That is what he means in the second half of this verse, "when your obedience is fulfilled."

Today, we have a choice of many churches in which to worship and to grow spiritually. Different churches take varying approaches to understanding God's word. Thirty years ago my father and I visited many churches every Sunday for a year before we found a church that taught salvation by faith alone, without works.

2 Cor. 10:14-18. For we are not overextending ourselves (as though *our authority* did not extend to you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ; not boasting of things beyond measure, *that is*, in other men's labors, but having hope, *that* as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, to preach the gospel in the *regions* beyond you, *and* not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment. But "he who glories, let him glory in the LORD." For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.

Paul is still addressing the issues that the troublemakers were raising in the Corinthian church. For we are not overextending ourselves (as though *our authority* did not extend to you). For it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ." It sounds like the troublemakers were claiming that Paul, an apostle, should not have even come to Corinth with the gospel. Would there even be a church in Corinth at this time if Paul had not brought the gospel there?

"Not boasting of things beyond measure, *that is*, in other men's labors." Paul was not claiming that he should be patted on the back for others who had ministered in Corinth. He had previously written in 1 Cor. 3:6, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." Paul planted the gospel in Corinth, and Apollos taught them more. It is God who should be praised.

"But having hope, *that* as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere." Paul was concerned that the people to whom he ministered would not only believe in Jesus Christ, but that their faith would increase. Paul wanted "to preach the gospel in the *regions* beyond you." Paul was preparing to bring an offering to the suffering believers in Jerusalem. Then he hoped to go to Rome and from there to Spain (Rom. 15:24). "Whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while." If the faithful believers in Corinth were unable to set things straight with the troublemakers, then he would have to add Corinth to his itinerary.

"He who glories, let him glory in the LORD." Paul is quoting Jer. 9:24. "Let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD."

"For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends." The troublemakers in Corinth were running Paul down and claiming Paul's work for themselves. On Paul's part he did not want "to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment." Paul recognized that whatever we accomplish for the Lord in this life, we do so through learning and knowing God's word and through the power of the Holy Spirit. These are the divine resources God has given us. In the end, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Paul also wrote in 1 Cor. 4:5, "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God."

I am not here for the praise of men, but to glorify God in all that I do. But whether I have the proper motives or understand correctly from God's word what I should be doing, I will not know for certain until after Christ's return. I do know that there is a lot that I should be doing better.

2 Cor. 12:7-10. And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Paul writes a lot in this letter defending himself from the troublemakers in Corinth. Earlier in this chapter Paul describes a person who "was caught up to the third heaven ... was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Cor. 12:2-4). There is general agreement that he was referring to himself. We know nothing more of this experience. Paul did not want to boast about it. Also what he heard was not lawful for him to repeat. So much for those who think they have had a similar "near death" experience and then write books about it.

What is the promise: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Dr. Constable's *Notes* quotes Warren Wiersbe: "What is grace? It is God's provision for our every need when we need it."

Paul even makes application for us. "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ' sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." These are the facts of life. As believers in Jesus Christ, we will all face infirmities, reproaches, needs, persecutions and distresses and perhaps much more. I look on these as tests of faith. God has given me His word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit to teach me and to enable me to handle all challenges.

How many Bible promises can we recall to apply to the problems we face every day? Consider:

- > 1 Pet. 5:7. "Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."
- > Phil. 4:6-7. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God; and the peace of God that surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."
- > John 14:27. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."
- > Isa. 41:10. "Fear not, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you. I will uphold you with My righteous right hand"
- > Nahum 1:7. "The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him."
- > Rom. 8:28. "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."
- > Prov. 3:5-6. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean no on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."
- > Isa. 26:3-4. "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, for in Yahweh, the LORD, is everlasting strength.

Eph. 4:26-27. "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.

How can Paul command us to "be angry" in today's verse when five verses later in Eph. 5:31, he writes "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice"? My wife and I heard a message on Eph. 4:26 last Sunday that answered the question for us. English was not one of my favorite subjects in school which may explain why I studied engineering and finance. So when a preacher starts talking about Greek grammar it pushes the limits of my ability to understand. But understanding this verse requires a look at the grammar. I had heard it taught in a similar way perhaps forty years ago. So the approach is not unique.

The usual approach I hear for reconciling the apparent inconsistency in Paul's treatment of anger in Eph. 4 is to look at the way Jesus handled the money changers' tables in the Temple. Twice, He drove the money changers out of the Temple, accusing them of "having made it a 'den of thieves'" (Matt. 21:12-13). These two acts of Jesus are said to have been done in anger, which the preachers call "righteous indignation." But the texts do not say that Jesus was angry.

Mark 3:5 does present us with an incident where Jesus is said to have "looked around Him in anger." This was one of those times when the Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus. It was the Sabbath. Jesus entered the synagogue and there was a man with a crippled hand. The tense of the verb helps us understand Jesus' reaction. It also illustrates what Paul is saying in Eph. 4:26. Dr. Constable's *Notes* explains it this way: "The tenses of the Greek verbs indicate that Jesus was angry momentarily (aorist tense), but His attitude of compassion was persistent (present tense)."

Now the command in Eph. 4:26 "be angry," is not the usual grammatical form of a command. In fact, in English commands are never given in this grammatical way. Commands in Greek are usually in the active voice, as are all commands in English. The active voice says that the subject is to do the action. But "be angry" is in the passive voice which says that the action of the command comes from outside the subject. With the example of Jesus in Mark 3, the Pharisees acted in an inappropriate matter which caused a reaction of anger in Jesus. He did exactly what Paul tells us to do: "do not sin." Jesus put the anger aside and responding with compassion for the man, healed him.

Our pastor did not use the word temptation in his message. But this is what I see happens. Whether I react with anger when someone cuts in front of me on the freeway, or I see someone mistreating a dog, or even more significant acts, the anger is a temptation. I should set it aside and move on to the next challenge? If I let the anger continue, ruminating on it for the next few hours or days, then I have turned the temptation into sin. Temptation, in and of itself, is not sin. The sin comes when I give in to the temptation. A better way to translate Eph. 4:26 is "Though you have become angry, do not sin."

"Do not let the sun go down on your anger, nor give place to the devil." I need to cut the anger off immediately. If I don't, I am failing to "Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3). I have given in to my old man and am open for Satan or one of his junior assistants to take me into even greater sin.

2 John 4-6. I rejoiced greatly that I have found *some* of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father. And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.

The second letter of John was probably written to a church which he addresses as the "elect lady." John writes "I have found some of your children walking in truth." Paul also uses "walk" to describe how I as a believer in Jesus Christ should live my life as a Christian. We walk one step at a time. Will I obey God with this next step? Or, will I listen to the false ideas of the world? Or, will I submit to the lusts for pleasure or unjust enrichment that my flesh desires?

What is this truth in which I am to walk? How do I know that what I hear on television or see in a phone app is the truth? Is it all truth or is there error mixed in with the truth? The word of God is truth. I need to study and learn God's word, so that I can discern truth from error in what I hear and see from the world around me. Only through God's word can I have discernment to know truth from error.

John repeats the commandment he heard from Jesus. John repeats this commandment many times in his writings in the New Testament. "That we love one another." John 13:34, Jesus said to the disciples, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another." Preachers say that to love one another means to want the best for another person, to think the best of others. Are there clues in Scripture as to how I might do this in my life?

> Rom. 12:10-14. "In honor giving preference to one another ... distributing to the needs of the saints."

> Rom. 12:15-19. "Be of the same mind toward one another ... live peaceably with all men ... do not avenge yourselves."

> Rom. 13:10. "Love does no harm to a neighbor."

> Rom. 14:19. "Pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another."

> Rom. 15:5. "Be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus."

> Gal. 5:14-15. "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!"

> Gal. 5:26. "Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another."

> Gal. 6:2. "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

> Eph. 4:2-3. "With longsuffering, bearing with one another in love."

> Eph. 4:25. "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor."

> Eph. 4:29. "And be kind to one another, forgiving one another."

> Col. 3:13. "Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do."

> Heb. 10:24-25. "Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works ... exhorting one another."

> James 4:11. "Do not speak evil of one another."

> James 5:9. "Do not grumble against one another, brethren."

> James 5:16. "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another."

> 1 Pet. 3:8-9. "All of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another."

> 1 Pet. 4:9. "Be hospitable to one another without grumbling."

> 1 Pet. 5:5. "Be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility."

These "one another" passages show ways I can practice love for others.

2 John 7-9. For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.

This is a short letter of John written to a church to which he has ministered in the past and hopes to do so again. These verses are an important challenge he presented to the church and are significant for us even today. Unfortunately, there are some textual variants and a translation issue that can make application tricky. All three commentaries by Dallas Seminary professors that I checked discussed these variations and translation issues with similar conclusions

"For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh." This repeats warnings John wrote in 1 John. Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully human. To teach otherwise is heresy with severe consequences for teachers and anyone who is deceived by the false teaching. Today I hear Bible teachers with differing views on Scripture. Rarely, would I label any of these as heresy. Still when Scripture is mis-interpreted, the applications derived from the interpretations may also be inappropriate. John warns in the next verse about loss of future rewards. It can apply to any mis-application of Scripture.

"This is a deceiver and an antichrist." Not "the" Antichrist as many translations have it. "The" Antichrist will not be revealed until after the Church is caught up to the air to be with the Lord forever. The Greek text does not call for the definite article, "the" in the translation into English.

In verse 8, "Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward." This is the way the majority of Greek manuscripts read. But somewhere in the early centuries of the Church, a copyist changed the first and third pronouns in this verse from "we" to "you." When believers are led astray by false teachers, they can lose their rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. In 1 Pet. 5:4 Peter tells us that our pastors who lead us to spiritual maturity "will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away." This will happen at the Judgment Seat of Christ after He returns for the Church. I think it is highly likely that John wrote "we" in all three places because he understood this promise that Peter wrote, having learned it from the same source Peter learned it, i.e., from the teachings of Jesus Christ when He was ministering to his disciples.

In verse 9, "he who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son." John used the word "abide" 23 times in 1 John. He reminds us of the importance of abiding that Jesus taught His disciples in John 15. Jesus was telling His disciples to abide that they may continue to have an ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ even after He was gone. Heb. 2:1 gives us a warning about false teaching and what happens when we are taken in by it. "Therefore we must give the most earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away." Think of a boat tied to a dock. The dock is the truth of God's word. The boat is the believer. Cut the boat away from the dock. A wave of false teaching comes in and the boat moves away from the dock a short distance. A second wave comes in and it moves further away. Heb. 2:1 begins the first of five warning passages in Hebrews. The consequences for believers get more severe in Hebrews as each warning passage unfolds. I need to be careful to compare Scripture with Scripture to make sure my understanding is consistent with the full word of God. I don't want to be led astray by well-spoken preachers who take a passage and teach it out of context or otherwise misuse it.

3 John 1-8. THE ELDER, To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth: Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth *that is* in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. *If* you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.

John wrote this personal letter to a believer, Gaius. Although there are several men named Gaius mentioned in the New Testament, no one seems to know who this Gaius might be. He was a person to whom John had previously ministered.

"I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers." How did Gaius's soul prosper? Since the soul is immaterial, the prosperity to which John refers does not sound like material prosperity. Gaius's soul prospered as he grew in the truth and applied the truth of God's word in his "walk in the truth." When Paul was in prison in Rome he wrote this in Phil. 4:11-13 he said, "Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. ... I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Being able to face every situation in life and to experience the fruit of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, ..." (Gal. 5:22-23, that is a prosperity that surpasses any material prosperity. Also, I can continue to pray for the health of those who are on my prayer list.

John repeats what he wrote in 2 John about walking in the truth. Day by day, step by step, I need to apply the truth found in God's word.

"Beloved, you do well whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers." Verses 5-9 talk about hospitality. Travelers in the ancient world were dependent on strangers for a place to spend the night and for food or else they spent the night by the side of the road. Jesus' disciples and the early believers took the gospel throughout the ancient world. We have only limited accounts of where they went and the adventures they experienced. Rom. 12:9-13 is a paragraph that begins, "Let love be without hypocrisy." It ends in verse 13, "distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality." In 1 Pet. 4:8, Peter commands us "Be hospitable to one another without grumbling." There are numerous examples in the Bible of hospitality being provided for travelers. In the gospels Mary and Martha are well-known and they provided hospitality to Jesus and His disciples when they visited Bethany. Another example is the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:34, "Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household."

"If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well." John commends Gaius for showing hospitality to the missionaries, evangelists and Bible teachers whom he helped. "Taking nothing from the Gentiles." Missionaries and evangelists should not have to look to the unbelievers to whom they are ministering for their support. Their support needs to come from other believers. When we support missionaries, evangelists, and Bible teachers with hospitality, we "become fellow workers for the truth."



**Goatweed Leafwing, butterfly, Baytown, Texas**

Jude 14-15. Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, "to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

To understand what Jude is saying requires an understanding of what Jude wrote in the preceding verses. In verse 1 Jude identified himself as the brother of James. Both James and Jude are the half-brothers of Jesus. They were sons of both Joseph and Mary, whereas Jesus was the son of Mary only.

"Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam ..." Enoch is mentioned in Gen. 5:21-24. He is said to "have walked with God, and was not, for God took him." Enoch and Elijah were unique in that neither one is said to have died. God caught both of them up to heaven. Jude mentions that Enoch was the fifth-great-grandson of Adam and Eve. There are many false teachers today who say that there are gaps in the genealogies found in Gen. 5 and Gen 11, and that the world is a lot older than the 6,000-8,000 years these genealogies tell us about. There is no reason to twist the words of Scripture to try to fit the naturalistic suppositions of those who do not believe God.

"These men." Beginning in verse 3, Jude describes the harsh words of these "ungodly men" who are false teachers. Even though they are a part of the churches Jude writes in verse 12, "These men are spots in your love feasts," (communion or the Lord's supper). They are unbelievers. Jude expected these "ungodly men" to still be around at the second advent of Christ.

"Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints." Other translations use the term "holy ones" rather than "saints." Both translations are correct. The return of Jesus Christ includes an army of elect angels and believers in Jesus Christ. The believers previously having been caught up to meet the Lord in the air in the Rapture of the Church. Both elect angels and believers are the "holy ones." So Jude expected these "ungodly men" to be left behind on earth at the Rapture.

What is the destiny of these "ungodly men"? "To execute judgment on all." At the second advent of Christ, Matt. 25:31-46 describes the Sheep and Goats Judgment. This is a judgment of everyone who survives the Tribulation. Those who are believers are called "sheep." The nations are the unbelievers and are called "goats." The believing sheep enter into the Millennial kingdom promised to Israel while the goats are condemned to "everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). If I understand this correctly, these unbelieving Tribulation survivors begin to be barbecued 1,000 years earlier than the dead who are finally judged in Rev. 20:11-15. Jude expected the future prophetic events to begin during his lifetime and that of these "ungodly men."

In Jude 4 these "ungodly men" are said to "turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ" or as the *English Standard Version* translates this, "our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ," confirming the deity of Jesus. These "ungodly men" had not given up their former idolatrous worship and had not believed in Jesus Christ. Why then were they in the church? Jude doesn't tell us. But for me, my prayer is that with the Lord's help I may be able to rightly divide the word of God (2 Tim. 2:15).



**Black Buck, exotic mammal, private ranch, Polk Co., Texas**

Jude 19-21. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

"These are sensual persons." The word for "sensual is an adjective based on the noun often translated "soul." In 1 Cor. 2:14 the word is translated "natural": "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Jude is re-affirming that these ungodly men, false teachers, are unbelievers. The Holy Spirit is not dwelling in them according to the way the translators have interpreted the word "Spirit" in this verse by capitalizing it. Looking at it another way, they are unbelievers still in their natural state in which they were born, not having been born again through God's new creation. 2 Cor. 5:17. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

"Who cause divisions." The false teaching of these men is causing divisions in the church.

"Keep yourselves in the love of God." In John 15:10 Jesus said, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." John wrote similarly in 1 John 2:3 and 5. "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. ... But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him." "Keep yourselves in the love of God" is the main verb in this sentence on Jude and is supported by three "-ing" verbs. Jude is saying that my daily Christian walk must be in obedience to God's word. How do I do that? Jude gives a three step recipe.

"Building yourselves up on your most holy faith." I was saved through faith in Jesus Christ. Now I must continue to build on that faith through God's word. By learning God's word, I can discern between what is true and false that other people may be teaching. As I apply God's word and obey His commandments, I will grow in my spiritual life.

"Praying in the Holy Spirit." I should be filled by means of the Holy Spirit when I pray. The Holy Spirit guides me in my understanding of Scripture. I should pray for the Spirit's guidance when I read and study the Bible. I like the way a preacher expanded on 1 Thess. 5:17, "Pray without ceasing." The preacher phrased this verse in his own words, "Pray with the frequency of a hacking cough."

"Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." This is my hope, the confident expectation that I should have, that Jesus could return at any moment. I have an eternal future with God forever. In whatever difficulty or adversity I may face, God knew about it when He created this world and made provision for me.



American Robin, Rockwall, Texas

Jude 22-23. And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling *them* out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.

"And on some have compassion, making a distinction." Most translations of this verse differ markedly from the King James and the New King James. But all the translations fall within the range of meanings for the Greek vocabulary Jude uses. "Compassion" is probably not a good choice because the word Jude used is the verb form of the noun "mercy" mentioned in the prior verse. We should have concern and compassion for those who are being led astray by the false teachers. But when we read "compassion" we miss the link with "mercy" in the previous verse. The false teachers were leading the church away from the truth that these believers had previously been taught about Jesus Christ. The believers who were solid in their faith needed to use discretion in how best to help the doubters who were being confused by the false teachers. In that sense "making a distinction" makes sense. Some would need help in one way, but others in another way.

Paul said much the same thing in Gal. 6:1. "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted." James also wrote about this ministry to weaker Christians in James 5:19-20. "Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins." When James writes, "Brethren, if anyone among you, ..." the "anyone among you" are believers among the brethren to whom James is addressing.

Combining these three passages, here is what I see as some guidelines for helping other believers who are struggling in any way in their faith and walk with the Lord.

- > "you who are spiritual." I would take this to be a believer who is walking by means of the filling of the Holy Spirit. He is also undoubtedly a maturing believer. This would be a believer with no unconfessed sin in his life, who is obeying the commandments of Scripture to the best of his ability.
- > "in a spirit of gentleness." Having compassion or mercy. Correcting another believer must be done in love, not with a sledgehammer or in anger. As Jude 20 says, "praying in the Holy Spirit."
- > *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* adds that "the apostates ...should not be slandered or criticized." As James 4:11 says, "Do not speak evil of one another, brethren."
- > "considering yourselves lest you also be tempted." I need to be careful not to be deceived myself by the arguments of the false teachers. I also need to be careful not to speak evil, criticize, malign, or slander anyone involved in the controversies, either the false teachers or those in danger of being led astray.

"Others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire." The commentaries I read allow that the "others" here could be either believers or unbelievers. "Fire" is used in Scripture as a reference to God's judgments: Either to eternal judgment in the Lake of Fire prepared for the devil and his angels, or to temporal judgment. The latter, temporal judgment, could very well be the case here in Jude. In James 5 turning "a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from (the sin unto) death." Fire is also used in 1 Cor. 3:11-15 to test each one's work at the Judgment Seat of Christ.



**Gray Hairstreak, butterfly, San Marcos, Texas**

Jude 24-25. Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.

Jude concludes this letter with one of the fullest and most beautiful benedictions in the Bible. This benediction also is a follow-on to what he has written in the earlier verses.

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling." This reminds me of the familiar verse on temptation in 1 Cor. 10:13. Any believer who has done any verse memorization has probably memorized this verse. "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

Read this first sentence in verse 24 carefully. It says God is able to keep you (me) from stumbling. It does not say that He absolutely will keep me from stumbling. Just as 1 Cor. 10:13 says that "with the temptation (God) will also make the way of escape." Jude told his readers how to escape from being deceived by the false teachers. When his readers did these things they could expect that God would keep them from stumbling over the false teachers' messages.

- > Build "yourselves up in the most holy faith." I should learn God's word, believe it and apply it.
- > "Praying in the Holy Spirit." Frequent and regular prayer is important, as is, being filled by means of the Holy Spirit in my walk with God.
- > "Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Keeping myself focused on Jesus Christ and His promises.

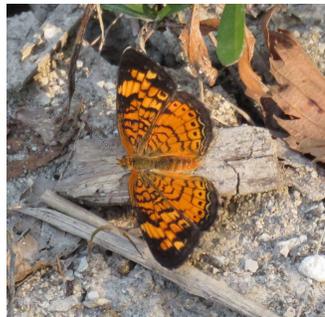
All these "-ing" verbs support the command "Keep yourselves in the love of God." I need to walk in fellowship with God, obeying His commands. When I fail and sin, I need to confess the sin and turn from that sin.

"And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory." The commentaries I read agree that this refers to the Judgment Seat of Christ where all believers will have their lives evaluated as to how well they utilized the divine resources provided by God through the Holy Spirit and His word. We will be presented "faultless" or "blameless" because Jesus' perfect righteousness has been imputed to us. We will not be evaluated at the Judgment Seat of Christ for our sins or failures to obey God. The evaluation is to determine which believers will receive even greater rewards than just simply an admission ticket to God's kingdom and eternal life.

"To God our Savior (Jesus Christ), Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen." Whatever the ungodly false teachers were saying about Jesus Christ, Jude completely refutes with this closing praise to God. Jesus is fully God.

But Jesus also "is wise." God is omniscient in that He knows everything that is knowable. But Jesus in His humanity exercised wisdom in overcoming the world during His life on earth.

"Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power." God is sovereign and omnipotent. But Jesus will one day reign over all the earth as king, the absolute ruler, during the Millennium and then continuing for all eternity in the New Heaven and New Earth.



Phaon Crescent, butterfly, Plano, Texas

Rev. 1:3. Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time *is* near.

Understanding the book of Revelation is a challenge. The first problem is the variety of ways Bible teachers interpret the book. The first time I heard it taught in any detail was the summer of 1958. I had to go back to college at the end of the summer, so I heard the pastor teach only part way through the book. I have since heard it taught completely through by five separate pastors and have audited a Dallas Seminary course on Revelation taught by Dr. Stanley Toussaint. Not all of them agreed in every point, but at least they agreed in their approach to understanding what was written. They did not try to allegorize the message of the book. They all held to a dispensational, pre-tribulational, pre-millennial view of prophecy.

The first time I heard it taught the pastor called Revelation the "grand central station" of the Bible. Meaning that a lot of what is said in this book are references to other parts of the Bible. If you know what the other Bible passages are saying, then you can know what the book of Revelation is saying.

Rev. 1:19 gives an outline for the book. "Write the things which you have seen (Rev. 1), and the things which are (Rev. 2-3), and the things which will take place after this (Rev. 4-22)." An example of one of the erroneous approaches to understanding Revelation is what I believe was the view of Dr. Ironsides, but also held by others. Rev. 2-3 refers to different epochs of the Church Age. The Church would go through various stages of apostasy in straying from God's word. Those who have taught me understand these chapters literally. These two chapters were problems in the then existing seven churches named which also are continuing, even in churches today.

Revelation was written late in the first century, in the mid-90s. It was not written in the mid-60s as some teach. I was privileged to be in the audience when Dr. Mark Hitchcock debated Hank Hanegraaff on the dating of the book of Revelation. Hank Hanegraaff's viewpoint was that Revelation is a historical account of past events all of which occurred during the first century. Revelation does not contain future prophecy to be fulfilled. His opening statement in the debate was to quote Revelation 1 from memory. Dr. Hitchcock's PhD dissertation at Dallas Seminary was on the dating of Revelation and the majority of the audience was biased to Dr. Hitchcock's position. The recording of the debate is available on-line.

"Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy." Revelation was written to be read and understood. This statement refers to the person who would have read the book aloud to a congregation as well as those who heard it read. The book is meant to be a blessing. God has given us prophecy for our comfort and encouragement. I still have a lot to learn in the book of Revelation.

One of the messages that God wants us to know from Revelation is that what God has promised to Israel in the Old Testament, He will keep. Israel's failure to recognize Jesus as their Messiah does not mean that God has forgotten about Israel. My God is a God of truth. He keeps His promises. Because I know that God will keep His promises to Israel, I can know that God will keep His promises to me.



**Cave Swallows, Beeville, Texas**

Rev. 1:4-6. John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

"Grace to you and peace." Grace is a reminder of how God deals with us. I don't deserve what God has done, is doing and will do for me. I have the privilege of living with God for all eternity. Peace is another aspect of my relationship with God. I no longer will face God's future judgment because of my sins. But there is a second part of that peace I have from God. Peace is a part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. This peace is an attitude of contentment, tranquility and stability when I am walking in fellowship with God. This is an inner peace we all can have from our ongoing trust in God that He has everything under control.

"From Him who is and who was and who is to come." This is a reference to the eternity of God. Specifically, this describes God the Father.

"From Jesus Christ." The second member of the Godhead.

"From the seven Spirits who are before His throne." "His throne" would be the throne of God the Father because Jesus Christ is not yet sitting on His throne. He is sitting with God the Father on His throne (Rev. 3:21). So who are the "seven Spirits"? The *New King James Version* deifies the seven Spirits by capitalizing the word "Spirits," whereas other translations use the lower case "s." Some commentaries say that the seven spirits are the angels of the seven churches in Rev. 2-3. The seven Spirits are mentioned again in Rev. 4:5 in the magnificent description of the throne room of God in Rev. 4-5. Isa. 11:2 mentions the "Spirit of the LORD" along with six descriptions of the Spirit: "The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD." Some think that the seven Spirits in Revelation may be based on this Isa. 11 reference. My preference is that the Seven Spirits mentioned in Rev. 1:4, is a reference to the Holy Spirit and His characteristics. All three members of the Trinity are mentioned here.

"To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood." This is the saving work of Jesus Christ on the cross. He died in my place to save me by giving me forgiveness of my sins and eternal life. The washing is the once for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ for my sins, but also His ongoing ministry of cleansing me from my sins as it says in 1 John 1:9. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

"Has made us kings and priests." This phrase is repeated in Rev. 5:10. This is best understood as other translations say, "Has made us a kingdom, priests." This is what God had offered to Israel in Exo. 19:6. "You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Israel failed in serving God, and God limited the priesthood to the tribe of Levi. But we as believers in Jesus Christ are a kingdom of priests like God intended for Israel. As a believer priest I can come directly to God in prayer. I don't need to confess my sins to a human intermediary. I can confess them directly to God. I can represent God to the world around me. I can have a moment by moment relationship with God as I abide in Him and "walk worthy of the calling" with which I was called (Eph. 4:1).



**Ruddy Turnstone, Sargent Beach, Texas**

Rev. 1:7-8. Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

Understanding Revelation has its challenges. Even among Bible teachers who hold to a dispensational, pre-Tribulational and pre-Millennial view of Scripture there are differences. I will try to give my understanding and why I understand things the way I do, as well as I can without an overly lengthy discussion.

"Behold, He is coming with clouds." The "He" is the Lord Jesus Christ. But is this the Rapture or the Second Coming? 1 Thess. 4:17 says, "Then we who are alive will be caught up together with them (the "dead in Christ" from verse 16) in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." Note this verse says we ascend "in the clouds" while Rev. 1:7 says Jesus returns "with clouds." So at the Rapture we as believers will be caught up into the clouds. At Jesus' ascension in Acts 1:9 "a cloud received Him" as He ascended. In Acts 1:11 two angels said Jesus would return "in like manner." Dan. 7:13 describes the second coming of Christ, "One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven." So to me, the second coming of Jesus better fits Rev. 1:8. Rev. 19:11-16 certainly describes Jesus' second coming. So the first prophecy in Revelation here in verse 8 opens with the second coming and then the narrative continues with events leading up the second coming which is described in more detail in Rev. 19.

"Every eye will see Him." The second coming will not be a secret event, whereas the Rapture is unseen. One moment I will be here doing whatever I am doing (hopefully obeying God's commands) and "poof" I am gone. What the unbelieving bystanders will see is that I disappeared.

"Even they who pierced Him." Zech. 12:10 prophesied that at Jesus' return, that the Jews "will look on Me whom they pierced." John 19:37 also quoted this verse from Zechariah. Zechariah 12 also mentions the mourning that takes place when people realize how Christ suffered for them.

In Rev. 1:8, "the Beginning and the End" is not found in either the older manuscripts or in the majority of manuscripts. It was a scribal addition probably sometime in the middle ages. The *New King James Version* also drops the word "God" after the word "Lord." It should read that the "Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" is speaking. In Rev. 1:4, God the Father is said to be "who is and who was and who is to come." This phraseology appears in Rev. 22:13 where it refers to Jesus Christ. Since both God the Father and Jesus are God, both statements are correct. To know to whom they refer must be determined from the context.

For us today, the next event of prophecy which is to happen is the return of Jesus Christ for His Church. We call it the Rapture. Some people say the word "rapture" never appears in the Bible. That is true, unless you read the Latin Bible translated by Jerome. Jerome translated the word, "Caught up" from 1 Thess. 4 with the verb which means "to rapture" in English. The English word for "rapture" is derived from the Latin verb. After the Rapture all the events of Rev. 4-20 will unfold. Then comes our final destiny where we will spend Eternity with God, Jesus Christ, in the New Heaven and New Earth of Rev. 21-22.



Viceroy, butterfly, Houston, Texas

Rev. 3:19-20. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

Verse 20 is a familiar verse that is often used as a salvation verse. But Rev. 2-3 are letters to seven churches which are expected to be composed of believers. This church, the Laodicean, was lukewarm. Think of water: cold water refreshes. Hot water stimulates and soothes. Or who wants to drink lukewarm coffee? I prefer my coffee hot, but some people even drink iced coffee. But the lukewarm analogy here refers to the spiritual condition of the Laodiceans. They were not serious in their walk with the Lord.

The Laodiceans were lackadaisical. This city was a wealthy city. The people "have need of nothing" (verse 17). So in verse 18, "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire." This reminds me of the passage in 1 Cor. 3:11-15 where each believer's work is tested at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The "wood, hay, straw," of course, are burned up. But "gold, silver, precious stones" remain. The Laodiceans need to get with God's program so they will have gold to be tested in the evaluation of the Judgment Seat of Christ. Verse 18 also mentions "white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed." Rev. 3:4-5 says, "You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments." The message for me out of this is that it is important how I live my life. Do I obey God or do I just kind of roll along, doing things my way with an occasional nod to God on Sundays?

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." This sounds like Heb. 12:6 which quotes Proverbs. "For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." The Laodiceans were in danger of divine discipline if they continued on their lukewarm path. "Therefore be zealous and repent." The word "repent" comes to us into English from Jerome's poor translation of the Greek word into Latin. The Greek word means to "change your mind." The context tells us about what we should change our minds. You Laodiceans need to start working up a sweat in your Christian lives. Am I serious about learning what God's word says? Have I forgotten what the pastor taught by the time Sunday dinner is finished? Do I apply God's word to every aspect of my life? Do my prayers focus on what I want and think I need and ask for what might be nice to have? Or are my prayers centered on how great my God is and what He would want from me? Do I know how God wants me to live my life? Do I live my life according to how I know God wants me to live?

For the Laodiceans, they were rich and prosperous. They had eternal life. They were enjoying the good times. Even though they were believers, God was not a part of their day to day lives.

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. ..." Yes, this is an invitation. But it is not an invitation to the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, but an invitation to a fellowship relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus' invitation to this fellowship now, is a preparation for my eternal relationship with Him in eternity. If Jesus is a stranger in my life now, will He be a stranger also in eternity? Now is the time to know Him and the great things He has done, is doing and will do.



Clark's Grebe, Lake Balmorhea State Park, Texas

Rev. 3:21. "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

My view of the overcomers in Rev. 2-3 differs from that of a lot of Bible teachers whom I love and respect. Two of the three commentaries I usually check took the view contrary to mine. The third said in brief form what I will try to explain. I also limit the length of each of these devotionals, so this is not a complete discussion of the subject.

Many Bible teachers relate the seven overcomer statements in Rev. 2-3 back to 1 John 5:4-5. "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" Their position is that every believer will overcome the world. This is the Calvinistic position of perseverance of the saints. This makes works a post-requisite for our eternal salvation. If you don't have enough good works in your life, then you were never saved.

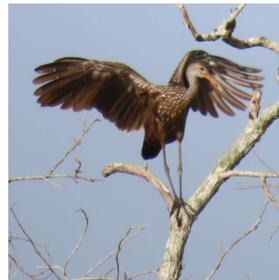
My understanding of 1 John 5:4-5 is that now that I am saved, I have the ability to overcome the world. Whether I do so is up to me. Sometimes I obey God. Sometimes I fail. That is why John wrote 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins ..." Consider Eph. 4:22-24 where we are commanded to "Put off ... the old man" and "put on the new man." It is our new man who overcomes the world. But sometimes our old man takes control and we fail. Also I think it is better to understand 1 John 5:4-5 within its context. In 1 John 4:1-3, John tells us to test the spirits, the false prophets who "have gone out into the world" and who do not confess "that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh." So in 1 John 5:5, a believer who overcomes the world "believes that Jesus is the Son of God" in contrast to the false prophets of 1 John 4:1-3.

I think it is better to relate the overcomers of Rev. 2-3 to Jesus Christ in John 16:33. Jesus overcame the world during His life. "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Jesus didn't need to overcome the world so that He could be saved. Overcoming the world was what Jesus did every day. Overcoming the world and its faulty ideas is the way I need to live.

The seven overcomer statements in Rev. 2-3 contain promises to each of the seven churches of potential rewards those believers will receive if they are faithful in overcoming their shortcomings.

Two of the overcomer promises provide difficulties to many interpreters. Rev. 3:5 says that the overcomers will not have their names blotted out of the Book of Life. Since God never blots anyone's name out of the Book of Life, this statement is best understood as a figure of speech called a litotes where a positive is stated as a negative. Another example of a litotes in Heb. 6:10, "God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love." Rev. 2:11 is the second difficult overcomer passage. The overcomer "shall not be hurt by the second death." Some call this another litotes. This could also be thought of as not suffering loss at the Judgment Seat of Christ when your good works are destroyed by the flames of the Lake of Fire (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

We are saved by faith alone in Christ alone. There are no works required either in believing or after believing. However, how I live my life after believing in Jesus Christ will determine the level of reward that I may receive at the Judgment Seat of Christ.



**Limpkin, near Brazos Bend State Park, Texas**

Rev. 4:9-11. Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created."

I thought these verses would be relatively easy to figure out. But the interpretations are all over the place. Rev. 4 begins the main part of Revelation which runs all the way to the end of the book. This part is a prophecy of what will happen in the future. The second and third chapters are letters to the seven churches giving a picture of the trends that will exist in churches from the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 until the Rapture. In Rev. 4:1-2 John receives an invitation to come up through an open door into heaven. Immediately John enters into a magnificent scene in the throne room of God. Rev. 4-5 describes what happens in God's throne room.

Who are the characters in this scene? In verse 2 we have One sitting on the throne. That would be God the Father. In verse 4 we are introduced to the twenty-four elders. An associate pastor of our church several years ago preached a message saying that these twenty-four elders were angels. But no where else in the Bible are angels described as elders. Let's look at the context. These elders are "clothed in white robes." In Rev. 3:4-5 the overcoming believers in Sardis are promised a reward of "white garments." In Greek there are two words for "crown." There is the crown of a king or ruler and a victor's crown for a conquering general of the army or an winning athlete. The word used here is the victor's crown. In several New Testament passages believers who faithfully serve the Lord are promised a victor's crown. These 24 elders are believers who have been raptured to heaven. They have received their crowns and white garments at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Then there are "four living creatures" with fantastic descriptions in Rev. 4:7-8. These are angels. You can read in Ezekiel 1:5ff another fantastic description of four living creatures which may be the same four angels John sees in Rev. 4. Isaiah 6 also gives a view of God's throne room with a fantastic description of angelic seraphim.

"In verse 9, "Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne ..." We have a picture of these four angels praising and glorifying God. The twenty-four elders respond by falling down and worshiping "Him who lives forever and ever." They also "cast their crowns before the throne." A believing friend one time commented to me that he looked forward to the day when he would cast His crown before the Lord. Although I think that God has given us the passages describing the potential for crowns and rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ as an incentive and encouragement for us to live our lives in obedience to God, I don't know if I will qualify for any reward. I know all too well my own failures. I won't know what, if anything, I will receive at the Judgment Seat of Christ until that time comes.

The elders cast their crowns before God because it was God's provision of His word and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit that they were able to live their lives according to God's will. God the Father who is sitting on the throne planned the creation of the world and all things in it. Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit fulfilled their functions in the execution of creation. I need to remember more often to praise God for everything He has done, is doing and will do.



**Northern Jacana, Estero Llano Grande State Park, Weslaco, Texas**

Rev. 5:8-10. Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."

The Lamb in verse 9 is the Lord Jesus Christ who is worthy to open the scroll. Rev. 5:5 identified the Lamb as the one who is worthy to open the scroll. When Jesus takes the scroll to open it, the four living creatures (angels) and the twenty-four elders (Church Age believers) worship the Lamb. The gender of the Greek words show that it is only the twenty-four elders who each have a "harp and golden bowls of incense."

"And they sang a new song." The twenty-four elders sing the first stanza in verse 9. "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For you were slain, And have redeemed us to God." Angels are not redeemed. The elect angels who remained faithful to God and did not follow Satan are here in heaven worshipping God. Jesus did not die for the fallen angels.

I have not found a single English translation that translates these verses correctly. The translators misunderstand this passage and reworded their translations in ways that made sense to them. We have four choirs singing antiphonally in heaven. In verse 9 we have the twenty-four elders singing. In verse 10 we have a quartet of four living creatures. In verse 11 we have an innumerable choir of angels. Finally, in verse 13, we have the combined choirs of all God's created creatures.

So what is going on with the translations? The "Critical Text" upon which most of our newer translations is based was derived from four manuscripts, considered the oldest manuscripts of the New Testament. The rule used to develop the Critical Text is that at least two of the four manuscripts had to agree on the wording for the wording to be included in the Critical Text. That rule was followed with one exception, Rev. 5:9. Three of the oldest manuscripts have the word "us" as in "have redeemed us." This agrees with the wording found in the later majority of New Testament manuscripts. Only believers can sing that they are redeemed. This cannot be sung by angels. One of the four older manuscripts omitted the word "us." I have seen a photographic copy of it. The scribe missed entering the word for "us." Looking at the photographic copy, the scribe's pen or quill was running out of ink when he reached the bottom of the page. The word "us" should have been the first word written at the top of the next page, but it wasn't. So in most of the newer English translations we have an inserted word in italics, "men," "people," or "persons." What the *King James* and *New King James Versions* did was to change the pronouns in verse 10 from "them" (the correct reading) to "us" to match the pronouns in verse 9.

When I read the Bible, I pay attention to the translation footnotes. We don't have a published English translation based on the Majority Text. We have several translations based on the Critical Text and we have the two King James versions based on the Textus Receptus put together by a middle ages monk named Erasmus. If a translation footnote indicates that both the Majority Text and Critical Text agree, then that is probably the better word choice. If the Critical Text and Majority Text differ, then which one fits best with the context and other parts of Scripture?

So James 2:19 says of these fallen angels, "Even the demons believe – and tremble." They believe, but they made their decision to follow Satan before God even created the heavens and the earth in Gen. 1:1. For us, our only opportunity to believe in Jesus Christ is while we are living on earth. There will not be a second chance after we die, just as the fallen angels do not have a second chance.

Rev. 12:3-5. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.

Rev. 12 is an overview of the history of the world with a focus on Israel, Satan, and Jesus Christ. Rev. 12:1 is the first sign which is Israel. The verse takes its imagery from Gen. 37:9-10.

"And another sign appeared." The second sign is "a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on its heads." In case we miss it, Rev. 12:9 tells us who this dragon is. "So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the devil and Satan." The future Antichrist of the Tribulation is described in Rev. 13:1 and 17:3 as "having seven heads and ten horns." So the Antichrist will be indwelt by Satan himself. But there is also an Old Testament reference. Dan. 7:7 prophesies about a beast (a world ruler) with ten horns. But in Dan. 7:24 the horns are identified as ten kings. One of them takes a lead and subdues three of the ten. The "serpent of old" from Rev. 12:9 confirms that the serpent who tempted Eve in Gen. 3:1 was Satan.

"Seven diadems." These are ruler crowns in contrast to the victor crowns that overcoming believers will receive. The Greek text uses a different words for ruler crowns and for victor crowns.

"His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth." Verse 9 confirms that it was angels that were cast to the earth with Satan. So the "stars of heaven" are fallen angels.

"And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child." In Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus, Herod planned to destroy Jesus (Matt. 2:13). When the Magi dodged Herod, then Herod had all the male children under two years old killed. This recalls former attempts by Satan to destroy the prophesied line of the Messiah. In Exo. 1 Pharaoh told the Hebrew midwives to kill all the newborn sons. In 1 Samuel King Saul tried to kill David. In 2 Chron. 22:10 Athalia "killed all the royal heirs of the house of Judah." In Esther, Haman, had the king order the killing of all the Israelites. Even the crucifixion of Jesus was an attempt by Satan to derail God's plan for this world. Then in modern times we have Hitler's holocaust. Today, we have the Palestinians and Moslems trying to destroy Israel.

"She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of Iron." This is a description of the rule of Israel's Messiah about whom David wrote in Psa. 2:8-9, as per Acts 4:25. This verse does not say that Jesus is now ruling all nations. This is correctly translated that this male Child was destined, was supposed to rule all nations. But something happened.

"Her Child was caught up to God and His throne." Acts 1:9-11 describes the ascension of Jesus Christ. This passage is a good example of what the preacher said years ago. Revelation is grand central station for the rest of the Bible. Knowing the entire Bible makes Revelation easier to understand. Even though Satan is the ruler of this world now, God is in control. His will will be done. Jesus Christ is not now the ruling king of the world. He is sitting with the God the Father on the Father's throne. Jesus' kingdom is yet future when the promise of the 1,000 year Millennium is fulfilled in Rev. 20. Then Jesus will sit on His own throne ruling the world.



**Common Raccoon, Mad Island Marsh Preserve, Texas**

Rev. 12:9-10. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.

Rev. 12:7-9 describes a war in heaven where Michael and His angels fight Satan and his angels. In today's passage we have the result: "So the great dragon was cast out, ... and his angels were cast out with him." This occurs near the mid-point of the Tribulation. The "dragon" is called "the serpent of old." This would be the serpent who tempted Eve in Gen. 3:1. He is also identified as "The devil and Satan." Satan and his fallen angels have been active now for 6,000 to 8,000 years deceiving "the whole world."

The unbelieving people of the world do not think the way God wants us to think. The world denies that God exists. The world says that all matter and energy have always existed. God did not create them. Once upon a time, thirteen billion, eight-hundred million years ago or so, there was a big bang which distributed all the matter and energy throughout the universe. Mankind thinks that we can solve all the problems in the world without God.

The Bible tells us that we are all one race. Darwin told the world that through evolution some so-called races were superior to others. Hitler took this idea, and considered that the German people were better than the other nations. He set out to conquer the world and to kill all the inferior races, particularly the Jews. Since the beginning of time one group of people have fought with other groups and enslaved them. During my life time the governments of the world have tried to solve the problems of discrimination between different groups of people. Has this solved the "race" problems? It looks to me like hatred and antagonism between the races has only increased in recent years. My father was a leader in providing financing for homes for minorities in Houston in the 1940s and 1950s.

Today the world has come up with gender identification ideas that are totally opposed to what the Bible teaches. They even violate the common sense ideas that we can learn from nature. Even our pet dogs and cats, the birds and the bees, and all of God's creatures know better.

Let me not be deceived by the ideas of the world which are inspired by Satan and his cadre of fallen angels. But let me learn from God's word what is truth.

In Rev. 12:10, John hears a loud voice and song of praise in heaven as the end of the Tribulation approaches. "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God and the power of His Christ have come." While Satan has access to heaven he accuses believers continually for all our disobedience and sometimes for alleged disobedience or motives. Remember the story of Job in the Old Testament. Since all of today's believers have been caught up to heaven by this time, I may be a part of that victory shout.



Loggerhead Shrike, near Madisonville, Texas

Rev. 19:11-13. Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.

"Now I saw heaven opened." John had previously reported in Rev. 4:1 "a door standing open in heaven." In this earlier vision John was commanded to "come up" to heaven. Now in Rev. 19 heaven is opened and a white horse and rider emerge. Since my understanding of the twenty-four elders in Rev. 4-5 is that they are resurrected believers, the "door standing open in heaven" could refer to the time of the Rapture. The reference to "heaven opened" in Rev. 19:11 is more easily understood and not as disputed as being a reference to the Second Coming of Christ since Christ is followed by armies in Rev. 19:14. The intervening chapters of Revelation, i.e. chapters 6 through 18 describe the time of the Tribulation.

Both Rev. 6:2 and Rev. 19:11 mention a "white horse" and a rider who "makes war" or "went out conquering and to conquer." These two passages appear to bookend the Tribulation with major battles or wars. The rider of Rev. 19:11 is "called Faithful and True." This matches the description of Jesus Christ in Rev. 3:14. Rev. 19:13 also says "His name is called The Word of God" which agrees with the description of Jesus from John 1:1. The rider of Rev. 6:2 is usually understood to be the Antichrist. Dan. 9:27 has the Tribulation beginning with a treaty or covenant between the nation Israel and the Antichrist ("the prince who is to come" of Dan. 9:26). So does God protect the nation of Israel in this Rev. 6 attack of the Antichrist? Does this result in a treaty between Israel and the Antichrist which the Antichrist will violate three and one half years later?

"On His head were many crowns." These are the crowns of a ruler, not the victor crowns which will be given to some believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ. At His Second Coming Jesus Christ returns to finally establish His promised Kingdom. Since His ascension He has been sitting with the Father on the Father's throne. Now Jesus will sit on His own throne ruling the world.

"He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood." This fits the description of the Messiah in Isa. 63:1-6. Jesus' robe is "dipped in blood" of His enemies whom He destroys in this great battle ending this final war of the Tribulation. In Texas' War for Independence from Mexico, the decisive Battle of San Jacinto lasted 18 minutes. I see this victory of Jesus happening in a wink of an eye and Jesus' enemies are destroyed.

"In righteousness He judges and makes war." God is totally righteous and just in what He does. But He is also "longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." 2 Pet. 3:9. God is waiting patiently, giving everyone in the world the fullest opportunity to change their minds about Jesus Christ and to believe in Him so that they can receive God's gift of the forgiveness of their sins and eternal life.

For me as a believer in Jesus Christ, I have received God's gift of the forgiveness of my sins and of eternal life. Now I have only so many days in which I can utilize the divinely given resources of God's word and the power of the Holy Spirit to live my life faithfully for Him. Will I obey God's commands today? Will I love others in the way I live my life? Will I walk in fellowship with my God and Savior, Jesus Christ?



**Blue-winged Teal, Lake Tawakoni State Park, Texas**

Rev. 19:14-16. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on *His* robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

These verses are still describing the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. One of the ways of differentiating the Second Coming from the Rapture is found here. At the Second Coming Jesus is accompanied by "the armies in heaven." At the Rapture believers are "caught up together ... in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." At the Rapture Jesus does not return to the earth, but only to the air or atmosphere above the earth. As Zech. 14:4 says at the Second Coming Jesus returns to the earth, "And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, ..."

The Second Coming is also described as being seen by the whole world, while no such description is given of the Rapture. Matt. 24:30, "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." The only visible sign at the Rapture appears to be the large number of people who simply disappear. What sort of tales will the news media spin about these disappearances?

The "armies in heaven" is plural as in multiple armies. Jesus is accompanied by an army of elect angels and with the believers caught up to heaven in the Rapture. Jesus said in Matt. 16:27, "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works." Rev. 17:14 says describing raptured believers, "and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful."

"Out of His mouth goes a sharp sword." This is the only weapon described. It is not carried in Jesus' hand. Does Jesus destroy His enemies with a word like the way He created the world in Gen. 1?

"Rule them with a rod of iron." This recalls Psa. 2:8-9. "Ask of Me, and I will give you The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron."

These armies of the nations which Jesus destroys are another attempt by Satan to destroy Israel. Satan wants to show that God cannot fulfill His promises to Israel. Does Satan really think He can win this game he is playing? Isa. 14:12-14 describes the fall of Satan. "How have you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How are you cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart" 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'" All these "I will" statements tell us of the arrogance and pride of Satan. But this is also a good description of our old nature. When I disobey God, I am saying that what I think or do or say is better than what God has said. God created people with the ability to choose for God or against God. Will I do things God's way or will I follow Satan's example?



Tree Swallow, Matagorda County, Texas

Rev. 19:17-21. Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, "that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all *people*, free and slave, both small and great." And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

The first two verses describe "the supper of the great God." Earlier in this chapter (19:7-9), the marriage supper of the Lamb is mentioned. There is a big contrast between the two suppers. Here we have all of the armies of the Antichrist lying dead on the ground. Ezek. 39:4 speaks of this "supper of the great God." "You shall fall upon the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you; I will give you to the birds of prey of every sort and to the beasts of the field to be devoured." Then Ezek. 29:12-14 says that it will take seven months to bury all the dead, probably referring to the bones that the vultures and hyenas have picked clean.

Rev. 19:19-21 review what has just happened and gives more details. "And I saw the beast (the Antichrist), the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army." These armies had entered the land of Israel when the Lord Jesus Christ descended in verse 11 on a white horse with the armies in heaven in verse 14.

"The beast was captured and with him the false prophet." "These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone (sulfur)." "And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And the birds were filled with their flesh." The "supper of the great God" is reiterated.

"The false prophet who worked signs in his presence." Sometimes we think that only God or those whom the Holy Spirit empowers can perform miracles. But that is not the case. In Egypt Pharaoh's idolatrous magicians were able to duplicate several of the plagues. There was also Paul's encounter with Simon the Sorcerer in Acts. In Matt. 25:27 the Pharisee's sons were said to cast out demons. In Rev. 13:3,14, the beast is killed, but then resuscitated in an imitation of Jesus' resurrection. These and more are all miracles performed by unbelievers using Satan's powers and authority as the present ruler of this world. We should not be taken in by real or apparent stranger than fiction signs and miracles. If the teaching does not agree with God's word or the signs are done by unbelievers, let me not be deceived.

Even though God has disposed of the beast and the false prophet, Satan and his fallen angels are still on the loose. They come up again in Rev. 20.

I worship a just God. He knows all the lies and injustices that people have done to me. God protects His people whom the Antichrist tries to destroy with his army. God will take care of those who trust in Him and faithfully serve Him.



**White-tipped Black Moth, West Tawakoni City, Texas**

Rev. 20:4-6. And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I* saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

This is an interesting and important prophetic passage. For the first three centuries following the writing of Revelation these verses were clearly understood by the church leaders to refer to a literal one thousand year kingdom on earth with Jesus Christ as king. This thousand year kingdom on earth is a prologue to our eternity in the new heaven and new earth of Rev. 21-22. Then came Augustine with his allegorical interpretation of prophecy denying the literal fulfillment of God's promises.

"And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them." Who is "them"? Jesus told us in Matt. 19:28 and Paul expanded on what Jesus said in 1 Cor. 6:2. Paul wrote "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" This is the whole group of believers in the Church Age who have been raptured as well as those from the Tribulation.

"Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God." John also sees this select group of martyrs from the Tribulation. They stood fast in their faithful belief in Jesus Christ under unbelievable persecution. How well am I prepared, if I live long enough, to stand up for Jesus under the persecution, hostility, and opposition to Christianity that I see coming? If the Rapture does not occur first, this world and our country is rapidly turning against the truth of God's word and against any form of Christianity. I have only a few years left. But you younger people need to prepare yourselves. You need to learn God's word. You need to apply it, so that when the going gets tough you (and me) may remain faithful.

"Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection." So this is the "first resurrection" and no one else has been resurrected before this? That doesn't sound right. Hasn't Jesus been resurrected? Is my understanding of the timing of the Rapture correct that it will occur before the Tribulation and believers will be resurrected at that time? How about the Two Witnesses of Rev. 11. Aren't they resurrected 3-1/2 years or so before this? This "first resurrection" includes all these resurrections. The "first resurrection" is reserved for believers only. The "second resurrection," which will follow the Millennium, will include all unbelievers of all time.

"They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." While the "them" of Rev. 20:4 includes all Church Age believers, the "they" in the statements following the introduction of the Tribulation martyrs in Rev. 20:4, I suggest may be referring back to these martyrs. These martyrs are true overcomers and so fit the pattern. They certainly would qualify with the overcomers of Rev. 2:26, "he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations." The believers who fail to overcome will be those at the bottom of the chain of command in the Millennium and will be ruled over by the overcomers. The non-overcomers are still saved, "yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:15).

Rev. 20:11-15. Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

This is the final judgment, called the Great White Throne Judgment. The Bible mentions other judgments, but this is the last one. If I may use the terms of our modern day legal system, God is the Plaintiff, the Judge and the Jury. The evidence is two-fold: "the Book of Life," and secondly, the "books were opened" ... "and the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books." Who are the defendants? The defendants are "the dead" (unbelievers who also are physically dead) mentioned three times in these verses.

Who is missing? First of all, Satan is missing. Rev. 20:10 says that Satan "was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are." So Satan has already been judged and his sentence was executed in the previous verse. Also missing are everyone who was in the first resurrection. (They are living again.) As Rev. 20:6 says, "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power." "The dead" who are judged at this Great White Throne Judgment are all the unbelievers throughout the ages of the earth. There is only one judicial decision rendered at this judgment. All "the dead" are cast into "the lake of fire." "Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire."

What is the basis by which these dead unbelievers were judged? They "were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books." But first, the Judge checks the book "which is." All the translations I looked at fill in the missing words, "which is the book of life." In eternity past, before the creation of the world in Gen. 1:1, God wrote in the Book of Life the names of everyone who would ever believe. When the Judge did not find the names of any of "the dead" written in the Book of Life, then He opened the books of works.

We think of good works and bad works. But Jesus died for everyone's sins, believer and unbeliever. 1 John 2:2, "And He Himself (Jesus) is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." The works in these books are all the good works that these dead unbelievers did. Their good works fail to meet the standard of the perfect righteousness of Jesus. The Judge's decision: "Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."

God has given me an awesome responsibility. Matt. 28:19-20. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." Jude expressed it cryptically in Jude 23: "but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire." God wants me to tell the unbelievers of the world about Jesus Christ that they may receive God's gift of salvation: the forgiveness of their sins and eternal life with God.



**Cinnamon Teal, American Coot, Common Gallinule, Anahuac NWR, Texas**

Rev. 21:1-3. Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God.

The Bible begins in Gen. 1:1 with the creation of "the heavens and the earth." Now at the end of the Bible, John sees the final destiny of every believer in Jesus Christ. We will spend the rest of eternity in the new heaven and new earth. If Adam and Eve had obeyed God and mankind had never fallen, we would still be living in that original Creation. But Adam and Eve disobeyed and passed on their sin to their descendants.

The heaven and earth have gone through other changes in the past and will experience future changes.

> First, God cursed the earth in Gen 3 after Adam and Eve sinned.

> Then there was Noah's Flood which destroyed all mankind except for Noah's family of eight people. Also the world after the Flood was radically different from before the Flood.

> In the future the Great Tribulation will wreak havoc on the earth. Isaiah 65-66 prophesies a new heaven and new earth which differs from the description here in Rev. 21. Isaiah's new heaven and new earth has seas and the moon, neither of which are present in Rev. 21-22. Isaiah may be describing a renovated heaven and earth in the Millennium.

> In 2 Pet. 3:10-13 we have the destruction of the earth by fire and burning, followed by a new heavens and new earth. Peter may be talking about either the renovated new heavens and earth of the Millennium or the new heaven and new earth of Rev. 21-22.

> Rev. 20:11 said that the heaven and earth fled away from God's face. "And there was found no place for them." This last reference does not mention fire and burning that Peter mentions. Rev. 21:1 says that the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. "No more sea."

Both the new creation in which Adam and Eve lived and the new heaven and new earth of Rev. 21:1 are perfect environments. Both Adam and Eve before their fall and the believers in the new heaven and new earth of Rev. 21 have a personal relationship with God.

"Then I, John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." Jerusalem will be the capital city from which Jesus will rule the world in the Millennium. This New Jerusalem will likewise be the capital city where Jesus will rule throughout eternity. Rev. 21:16 gives the dimensions of the city as 12,000 furlongs (perhaps a cube of 1,400 miles in each direction). Since it is a cube some people say it must be suspended above the earth in some way. But we don't really know.

These last two chapters bring us to the fulfillment of God's plan and purpose for the creation of this world. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men." As a believer I will be living with God in this new heaven and new earth. The world will be structured with tribes and nations. Each person in the world will be doing what he does best. I will be able to watch and learn first hand more about God and what He has done and is November 7, 2023 doing. In everything that goes on, God will be glorified.



Crested Caracara, Houston, Texas

Rev. 21:4-7. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.

"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, ..." This wiping away every tear is what occurs at the inception of the eternal state. Believers seeing the new heaven and new earth and New Jerusalem will have tears of joy at what they see, but also as they recall all that they went through in their previous lives in this world. In the eternal state also "there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, ... no more pain." I am sure that the brief descriptions we have of this promised future time do not begin to tell us what it will be like.

"The former things have passed away." The heavens and earth of the Millennial kingdom are no more. "Behold, I make all things new." We will be in the new heaven and new earth and I expect that we will stand in amazement like John did when we see the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. But maybe we already will know something about the New Jerusalem. This is a little guesswork on my part. The Bible does not tell us when God makes the New Jerusalem. It is mentioned by name only in Revelation. But Jesus did tell His disciples in John 14:2-3. "In My Father's house are many mansions ("dwelling places" is considered a better translation); if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." Could Jesus have been talking about preparing these dwelling places for us in the New Jerusalem? I had often thought that when I am caught up to Jesus in the clouds at the Rapture that I would be living in that dwelling place that Jesus prepared for me in heaven. I have heard some preachers call them "temporary dwelling places." Why? Because we will return with Jesus at His second coming and then be with Him during His reign in the Millennial kingdom. Maybe I am overthinking this stuff!

"Write, for these words are true and faithful." This statement could be said of everything God has given to us in the Bible. But here they refer specifically to the fantastic descriptions of future events we have in the book of Revelation. God has given us prophecy not so much as to satisfy our curiosity of what will happen in the future, but as an encouragement and comfort to us.

"I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts." This statement reminds me of what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman in John 4:13-14. "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." I take it that this sentence in Rev. 21:6 is an invitation to John's readers of all time to believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and for eternal life.

Then he adds to those who overcome that they will "inherit all things." "All things" sounds like it could be something more than just eternal life, like the potential for rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ for having overcome the false ideas and thinking of the world around us.



**Black-throated Green Warbler, Lake Livingston, Texas**

Rev. 22:8-12. Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, "See *that you do not do that*. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God." And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. "He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. And behold I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work."

"Now I, John, saw and heard these things." When I select verses to memorize or write about, I often am breaking into a flow of thought. In order to understand what is going on, I need to look at the context. Verse 6 identifies who is speaking, i.e. The Lord God ... sent His angel ... Then in verse 7 the angel spoke in the first person quoting Jesus, "Behold, I am coming quickly!" "These things" that John saw and heard are the return of Jesus Christ. But it has been 2,000 years. That does not sound very quick to me. That confuses some people who, while misunderstanding these statements, conjure up a false scenario that Jesus Christ somehow returned very soon after the book of Revelation was written. Now, I am still here so the Rapture has not happened. And the Second Coming of Jesus Christ will be seen by the entire world. When the angel quoted Jesus saying "I am coming quickly," he was saying that there is no other prophecy that needs to be fulfilled before Jesus returns in the air and we as believers are caught up together in the clouds to meet Him in the air (1 Thess. 4:16-17). The next event of prophecy to be fulfilled is the Rapture of the Church.

Then John "fell down to worship before the feet of the angel." Didn't John know that he was not supposed to worship angels? Yes, he knew that. But John got confused when he heard the angel quote Jesus saying, "Behold, I am coming quickly." With all these marvelous revelations John was seeing and hearing, he thought the angel was Jesus. Let me remember always what the angel told John, "Worship God." Jesus Christ needs to have top priority over everything else in my life.

"Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand." Contrast this with what Daniel was told to do three times in his Old Testament book. Dan. 8:26, "Therefore seal up the vision, for it refers to many days in the future." In Deuteronomy a prophet whose prophecy did not happen was considered a false prophet. Daniel was a true prophet, but no one living at the time would see its fulfillment. I think this is why he was told to seal up the vision. John was not under Moses' law and the prophecies of Revelation could have been fulfilled within John's lifetime. Therefore he was told not to "seal the words of the prophecy." I praise God that He has given me pastors who were not afraid to teach this book. God has given it to me for His glory.

"He who is unjust, let him be unjust still, ... filthy still, ... righteous still, ... holy still." When the Lord descends "with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet of God," it is too late. There is no time left for the unjust to change his ways, or for the filthy to clean up his act. Verse 12 logically follows, "And behold I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work." Verse 11 is talking about believers who are unjust or filthy or righteous or holy." Unbelievers have been cast into the Lake of Fire in Rev. 20:14. When Jesus returns for the Church in the Rapture, I will have my life evaluated at the Judgment Seat of Christ to see if I qualify for any rewards. Now is the time for me to clean up my act.

Rev. 22:13-14. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End, the First and the Last." Blessed *are* those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, ..." This is a statement that fits both God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. It is Jesus speaking at this point. This verse speaks of the eternity of God. All the matter and all the energy that comprise our present universe had to have had a beginning. It did not always exist. Our world could only be created by Someone who pre-existed our universe. So Rom. 1:20 says, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse." Both God's eternity and His omnipotence are obvious to every living person who has the ability to think.

"Blessed are those who do His commandments." This verse has what is called a textual variant in this statement. Many Bible translations says these blessed ones are believers who "wash their robes." The Critical Text of the New Testament put together from the four oldest manuscripts reads "wash their robes." What is called the Majority Text which is based on the majority of manuscripts reads "do His commandments." Now if "wash their robes" describes believers who have washed their robes in the blood of Jesus Christ as many commentators say, then this would appear to refer to all believers. But maybe this could describe only believers who have regularly confessed their sins and have been cleansed "from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Those who "do His commandments" also refers to believers, but not all believers faithfully obey God's commandments. Rev. 2:7 says the same reward of the promise of eating from the tree of life is to be given to those who overcome. John 16:33 says that Jesus overcame the world in His life. Jesus wasn't saved by overcoming the world. He didn't need to be saved. Overcoming the world was the way He lived His life. Jesus told His disciples in John 15:10, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." Keeping God's commandments is the way we as believers are to live our Christian lives and it results in an ongoing fellowship relationship with God. If Jesus had failed to keep God's commandments, His relationship with God the Father would have been broken. That is what happened to Adam and Eve. Of course, Jesus lived a completely sinless life.

"Have the right to the tree of life." My understanding is that this is one of the potential rewards that believers may receive at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Rev. 2:7 promises the privilege of eating from the tree of life to overcomers. Rev. 22:14 promises it to believers who obey God's commandments. Eating has always been considered a time of fellowship and friendship among people who dine together. One pastor commented that the privilege of eating from the tree of life indicates a better quality of life in eternity for the overcoming believers and for those who "do His commandments."

While all born again believers in Jesus Christ will spend eternity with God in the new heaven and new earth, the Bible includes multiple descriptions of potential rewards which will be given to some believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Our sins have been forgiven, so they are not judged or evaluated at this judgment. But how I live my life and how I have utilized God's provision of His word and the Holy Spirit will determine if I receive any of these rewards.



**Dusky-blue Groundsquirrel, butterfly, Bellville, Texas**

Rev. 22:15-17. But outside *are* dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie. "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star." And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

My position on this passage may be that of a minority of a few people, i.e. the pastor from whom I learned it in 2010 plus a few others. With that warning I will try to explain both positions.

"But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie." "Outside." This means outside the gates of "the holy city, New Jerusalem" of Rev. 21:2. New Jerusalem is the principal subject of Rev. 21-22. Most of what I hear and read about these verses look at this list of sins and assume that these are unbelievers who commit these sins. So the majority of Bible teachers assume that these sinners outside the gates are in the Lake of Fire. But the verse only says they are outside of the gates of New Jerusalem.

While New Jerusalem is mentioned in Rev. 21:2, that verse follows Rev. 21:1 where John sees "a new heaven and a new earth" where all believers and all the elect angels will live with God throughout eternity. New Jerusalem is not the same place as the new heaven and new earth. New Jerusalem is a city in the new heaven and new earth, but New Jerusalem is only a cube of 12,000 furlongs (perhaps about 1,400 miles long, wide, and high). I expect that the new heaven and new earth will be at least as large as our present universe. So even those people who are outside of the gates of New Jerusalem will have a lot of room in which to play around.

Eph. 2:8-9. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." When we see a list of sins in the Bible, why do we immediately think that the people committing these sins are unbelievers? One of Satan's biggest lies that he wants us to believe, is that the only way to get to heaven is by living a good life. He doesn't want us to place our faith in Jesus Christ. He wants us to be good little boys and girls so he can show God that he is smarter and better than God is. In short, believers can and do commit every one of these sins. Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone.

Jesus died on the cross and paid the penalty for all of our sins. As a believer I will not be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:11. In 1947 I believed in Jesus Christ and God saved me. He deposited to my account the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. God also gave me divine resources to enable me to live my life as He wants me to. He has given me His word that tells what I should do and not do, how I should think and speak. God's word has everything I need "for life and godliness" (2 Pet. 2:2-3). It is up to me to learn as much as I can about what God's word says, to utilize the power and filling of the Holy Spirit, to apply what God's word says, to confess my sins, and "to walk worthy of the calling with which" I was called (Eph. 4:1).

And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" My prayer and invitation to Jesus is to come today! Finally, verse 17 ends with an invitation to unbelievers in every generation who thirst to "take the water of life freely," to believe in Jesus (John 4:10-14).



**Cedar Waxwing, Sabine Woods Preserve, Sabine Pass, Texas**

Rev. 22:18-21. For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book. He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen.

We are warned against adding to or taking from these prophecies in Revelation. Prov. 30:5-6 also warns about adding to God's word. "Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar." Also consider what Paul wrote to the Galatians about believers who "pervert the gospel of Christ." Gal. 1:7-8. "There are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed." The Judaizers in the Galatian church wanted believers in Christ to continue under the Mosaic Law. They were adding works to the gospel message of salvation. If the Bible contains "all things that pertain to life and godliness" as 2 Pet. 1:3 says, do we really need a lot of worldly viewpoint, self-help books and humanistic psychology to solve our problems?

I pray that what I have been taught about God's word and my understanding of it may be correct. No one in this life can fully and accurately comprehend everything that God has given in the Bible. That is why faithful servants of God can teach various passages differently. The issue for each one of us is to try to understand what the original words of Scripture mean, what the writers of each passage were trying to say and how their readers or hearers would have understood what they were saying. The passing of 2,000-3,500 years since they were written makes this a challenge.

I need to point out two issues with the text. The *New King James Version* says that anyone taking away from these words will lose "his part in the Book of Life." The reference to "the Book of Life" is a textual variant not found in either the oldest manuscripts or the majority of manuscripts. The correct reading is almost certainly "the tree of life." The second issue is with the word "part" which is not an incorrect translation, but is better understood as "share" as in a "share of an inheritance." In the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15:12, he asked his father, "Give me the share of the estate that is coming to me." The Greek word translated "share" is the same word translated "part" in Rev. 22:19. The warnings in these verses describe the possibility of the loss of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ, as well as, the potential for divine discipline during our lives.

"The plagues that are written in this book." I take this to be the possibility of divine discipline for adding to the words of this prophecy. The believer is not likely to experience all the plagues or even the full extent of even one of the plagues. But even a small dose will not be pleasant.

The Bible has a lot to say about future events. God has given them to us so that we can know what He has promised us and planned for us. These promised prophesies should be a comfort and encouragement to us.

"Surely I am coming quickly." Through His angel, Jesus reminds John that the next event of prophecy will be the Rapture of the Church. Jesus' return could have happened within minutes or days of when John wrote this book. The same holds true today. Jesus could return before I hit return and send this message. I echo John's prayer: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

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