

Unveiling...

Life, But Not As We've Known It

Does it sound like we're
our credentials, asserting
do we need letters of endorse-
ment? Yes, but the endorsement is
anyone can read by just looking at you,
but with God's living Spirit, not chiseled
— and we publish it.
We couldn't be more sure of ourselves
think himself for God, are our letter of
a letter. His letter authorizes us to help carry
The Plan wasn't written out with ink on paper, with
footnotes, killing your spirit. It's written with Spirit
lives!

LIFTING THE VEIL

The Government of Death, its constitution chiseled on stone tablets, that
a dazzling inaugural, Moses' face as he delivered the tablets was so bright
that day (even though it would fade soon enough) that the people of Israel
could no more look right at him than stare into the sun. How much more
dazzling, then, the Government of Condemnation was impressive, how about
If the Government of Affirmation? Bright as that old makeshift arrangement
Government of Death alongside this new one. If that makeshift government
look downright dull alongside this brightly shining government, wouldn't it
impressed us, how much more this brightly shining government, wouldn't it

With that kind of hope to excite us, nothing holds us back. Unlike
Moses, we have nothing to hide. Everything is out in the open with us. It's
wore a veil so the children of Israel wouldn't notice that the glory was fading
notice it now, don't notice that there's nothing left behind that veil. Even
today when the proclamations of that old, bankrupt government are read
out, they can't see through it. Only Christ can get rid of the veil so they can
see for themselves that there's nothing there.

Whenever, though, they turn to face God as Moses did, God removes
the veil and there they are — face-to-face! They suddenly recognize that
God is a living, personal presence, not a piece of chiseled stone. And when
God is personally present, a living Spirit, that old, constricting legislation is
recognized as obsolete. We're free of it! All of us! Nothing between us and
God, our faces shining with the brightness of his face. And so we are trans-
figured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and
more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him.

Lynette Woods

Unveiling... Life, But Not As We've Known It

by Lynette Woods



Other titles:

Unveiling... Vignettes of Life
Unveiling... Lessons from Life
Unveiling... Portraits of Life
Unveiling... Being Full of Life

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Religion... but not as we've known it

"The time is coming when people will not tolerate sound and wholesome instruction, but, having ears itching for something pleasing and gratifying, they will gather to themselves one teacher after another to a considerable number, chosen to satisfy their own liking and to foster the errors they hold, and will turn aside from hearing the truth and wander off into myths and man-made fictions." 2 Tim. 4:3,4.

If there is anything that epitomizes "myths and man-made fictions" then religion would have to be it! These verses describe exactly what we see in the world today, whether people call it "religion" or not. Religion is a word very closely associated with the church and is thought of in a positive light by many Christians. Those outside of the church typically think of someone religious as being legalistic, traditional, crusading for Christianity etc. However, what I'm wanting to focus on is a One World Religion which I believe to be at the root and foundation of every single human being, regardless of age and regardless of what belief system they have and regardless of whether they go to church or not. This One World Religion is behind every religion that is on this earth (whether "Christian" or not). This religion has only one god and this god is worshiped and served like no other. The name of this religion's god is: Self.

Being religious extends far beyond Pharisees, beyond Muslims, beyond Christians, to the very core of who we are: Self with a capital S. Jesus said some awful things to the religious, so if this is true, then we may find Him saying some harsh things and upsetting a few of our temple's tables in order to reveal the god that is behind it all, releasing us from our self-made religion and revealing the freedom which can only be found in Him.

The etymology of the word "religion" is quite revealing. It stems from two words: *re* (again) and *ligare* (meaning to bind or tie, a bond or obligation). Religion puts people into bondage and blindness again and again. It is

part of the curse because it separates us from God. It is something which has been part of mankind ever since Adam and Eve decided to trust themselves and their own judgments rather than trusting God and we are daily faced with this same choice: trust God or Self.

Even people who believe they are not religious may be part of this religion because the basis of all religions and religiosity is Self; whether it is Self doing works or doing nothing and simply "being". Many leave their religion or church not because they heard God ask them to, but because that is what *Self wanted to do*; and the same can also be true for those who go back to it all. Self justifies anything and everything. This religion is quite simply a case of Self listening to Self. Self doing for Self. Self defence. Self righteousness. Self preservation. Self realization. Self help. Self enlightenment. Self justification. Self discovery. Self expression. Self governing. Self discerning and judging. Self disguised as "spiritual". Selfish to the core. This religion is based on *us* and what we think, do, and say whereas true spirituality is based upon all that *Christ* has done and is doing; upon all that He has said and is saying!

This religion of Self is not particular about whether you go to a church or not, whether you are devout outwardly or not; so long as Self is served. Its creed is: do whatever you believe to be right. This religion is all about what Self likes, what feels right to Self, what Self dictates and then "crusading" towards that end. And when the message which Christ proclaims through the Bible about denying Self, dying daily and losing your life is given, it is often rejected because the god which Self has created would not ever say such things! You get a reaction because the god of Self is governing rather than the God of Jesus Christ.

The Great Deception

The spirit of this world is not ignorant of our susceptibility to being governed by Self and makes the most of it by making what is false sound like truth; but the truth is it can be just *our* interpretation of what seems right to us. "But you must understand this at the outset, that no prophecy of scripture arose from an individual's interpretation of the truth. No prophecy came because a man wanted it to: men of God spoke because they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. But even in those days there were false prophets, just as there will be false teachers among you today.

They will be men who will subtly introduce dangerous heresies... With their high-sounding nonsense they use the sensual pull of the lower passions to attract those who were just on the point of cutting loose from their companions in misconduct. They promise them liberty. Liberty! - when they themselves are bound hand and foot to utter depravity. For a man is the slave of whatever masters him." (2 Pet. 1:20-2:1,18,19).

Many these days are bound by religion even when they have left the visible traditions of their religion. Their religion has not left them because they are still enslaved and governed by Self; they are finding "freedom" in SELF rather than in Christ. This is an absolute tragedy. It is also diabolically devious... to be tricked into leaving one form of bondage for another in the guise of "freedom" and thinking you are free and yet to still be imprisoned, is tragic.

How could we be so deceived? Because religion is a *spirit, it is spiritual*. Behind all of religion are spiritual forces which are determined to deceive "if possible even the elect". How do they attempt to do this? Through Self: what we see, hear, think, desire and even genuinely believe. When God opens our spiritual eyes to see what is real and true and what is merely an illusion of reality and truth, it is quite shocking. We wonder how we could have been duped and been so blind! Knowledge is a very powerful commodity; it can either release or bind. When we think we know something, we will stubbornly cling to that knowledge and not seek to find out more because we think we already know. But it is only when we realize we know *nothing* that we begin to know Everything (Christ) and receive Him as our Wisdom which sets us free from our very little world and religion of Self... We begin to discover the ever expanding Universe which is Christ in God.

Only what is received and revealed through Him can transform us. Religion will simply conform and deceive us. We need to be *born* into our Father's family and not just call Him "Father" or "Papa" because others do. We need a Revelation of Christ and not a religion about Christ. Saul of Tarsus was not released from religion by Stephen's amazing and Holy Spirit inspired speech; all it needed was for him to *personally see, experience and hear Christ for himself*; a Revelation of Christ. This principle still applies to each of us today.

We each need to see and know Christ for Who He really is rather than how we would like Him to be. My love for Him is not truly for Him if I don't want to see Him or accept Him as He is. Both historically and today, He often reveals something of Himself and people reject Him... just because He is different to what Self/Religion expected! Listen to what He says: "Anyone who intends to come with Me has to let Me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow Me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, My way, to saving yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? If anyone intends to come after Me, let him deny himself [forget, ignore, disown, and lose sight of himself and his own interests] and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life, will lose it; and whoever gives up his life for My sake and the Gospel's will save it." (Mark 8:34-36).

True Freedom

Only freedom from Self will bring true freedom from religion, obligation and bondage. This is why the message of freedom given in the Bible is Life which comes through death! The only way to be free of Self is to die to Self. Doing whatever Self wants is not freedom, but bondage; because you are bound to do what YOU want - Self is your master. Some pride themselves on what they can do within religion; others pride themselves on what they can do outside of religion. BOTH can still be religious because whether legalistic or liberal, by the book or having none, BOTH extremes may be dictated by Self and by the temperament or type of person they are naturally. BOTH extremes can be based on Self's preferences and what Self naturally likes; it is a religion where the god of Self is worshiped, deified and obeyed without question!

"God's will must not be made subject to my own temperament. When we know a man's make-up it is often all too easy to guess what "guidance" he will get, because his natural proclivities intrude so subtly upon the leading of God. Too much so-called guidance among us is little more than personal bias. A timid brother is "guided" to take a back seat. A forward brother is "guided" to take a front seat. Each claims to be led of the Lord. Is he? Or is his temperament ruling him? The pure will of God demands of me that what I am temperamentally shall be set aside. I should be so Spirit-filled that the man beside me cannot

foresee, on grounds of my temperament alone, how God will lead me. Oh let me beware of slanting the will of God in the direction of my own natural leanings! Even the Lord Jesus, whose own will was surely faultless, nevertheless set it aside in favour of the Father's who sent Him. If He should do that, how much more must I!" (*Watchman Nee, A Table in the Wilderness*).

Yes, *how much more must I?* Being led by the Spirit of God does not mean we are led by our natural preferences and whatever we like as some seem to believe. Religion and Self distort God, even to the point of creating a god in our own image; a god we are happy and content with, a god we can understand and identify with, a god we can worship and love. But there is *nothing loving about a god who does not convict or correct you* and just allows you to believe a lie and do whatever you want (see Heb. 12:5-11). That is not the God of Jesus Christ Who Himself said: "Those whom I dearly and tenderly love, I tell their faults *and convict and convince and reprove and chasten them*" (Rev. 3:19).

In the same way as we confuse socializing with fellowship, licentiousness with freedom and condemnation with conviction, so too we can confuse being religious with being spiritually mature. There is a vast gap between each of these 'dynamic duos,' for one is earthly and the other is heavenly.

God did not create religion, man did. At the tower of Babel man had a spiritual-sounding goal and were even united in their efforts "to reach the heavens". But God's verdict on all their hard work was: "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other. So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city." (Gen 11:6-8). Why did He do that? We today might think it a good thing to be as one people, all working together in unity on one thing, but God does not. Why? Because pride and Self were at the root of it and not God Himself. We still see His same judgment on religion in the world today: wherever people are like-minded and 'speak the same language' and work together building something here on earth, you eventually find division after division among them as they are scattered abroad.

Leaving the Confusion of Religion

Religion is certainly a confusion of many voices, it is a mixture of what is true and false that God must divide in order to reveal what is of Him and what is not. The very essence of Babylon and religion is mixture and confusion; in fact the name "Babylon" (which is the same Hebrew word for Babel) means: confusion by mixing. From the Garden of Eden to the end of this world, the mixing of truth with error remains a very successful means of deceiving and seducing us. In the book of Revelation in reference to Babylon is written, "by your magic spells and poisonous charm all nations were led astray, seduced and deluded. And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints..." (Rev. 18:23,24) and the cry to us all is: "*Come out from her*, My people, so that you may not share in her sins, neither participate in her plagues..." There are some things which God *must* divide and separate and which we *must* reject and turn away from.

People need religion to feel good about Self and what they're doing; but God scatters, confuses and divides in the hope that individuals will repent of their religion and turn to Him instead. His original desire was simply relationship with each and every human. In an attempt to have some form of that relationship, He set aside some as priests and prophets who would mediate between Himself and His people until His Son came to earth to completely undo the damage which had been done and to establish a personal, individual relationship with each of His children. God's focus is always Christ, and all the meticulous details and laws of the Torah were a way of pointing to the Perfection of Christ while also highlighting the imperfections and inadequacy of man.

Religion is basically a set of beliefs, personal beliefs... also known as mindsets and paradigms! Instead of having our beliefs formed by Self or other people, no matter how spiritual others may seem, we simply must learn to listen to only our Father and know His voice. We cannot trust ourselves but have to yield up our minds and what we think is right in order to learn Christ! "So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over

to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of Him and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." (Eph. 4:17-24).

We are new creations in Christ and as our minds are renewed we learn daily through experience to distinguish and discern between what is the new Life in us, and what is the old nature: Self. What is from God often makes no sense to Self, instead it may completely contradict what we naturally think. Not one of us is willingly deceived or duped by Religion. We will instead be *sincerely deceived*; we will sincerely believe that we are right! But sincerity does not mean something is true. We cannot discern right from wrong or truth from deception ourselves; at all! Discernment must come from outside of Self... it comes only from knowing the living Word of God; not a head knowledge of Him, but a genuine, experiential, intimate, heart knowledge of Christ as He really is which results in distinguishing between His voice and the many voices, *including our own voice*.

Religion robs God of what is rightly His: people's hearts! Religion is a substitute for Christ. The religious heart is absorbed and blinded by what it sees and worships - and it is the same end result whether you're worshipping Mary, the Church, Allah or unconsciously worshipping your Self! Religion results in blindness, bondage and death - again and again; *re-ligion* = being bound again. We desperately need to know through personal experience the liberation and freedom which only Christ brings and the true meaning of the word "release": to free and loosen (relax) and to have a lease again - to be given over to Another with a new lease of Life! May this be the experience and living testimony of each one of us.

"The Spirit of the Lord... has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" Luke 4:18,19.



Building... but not as we've known it

"On this rock I will build my Ekklesia, and death itself will not have any power over it. " (Matthew 16:18)

Most of us who read the verse above agree that "this Rock" is not some literal, physical rock seen on this earth but something unseen and invisible: the revelation of Christ which God alone can give ("flesh and blood have not revealed this to you but My Father..."). If seeing and knowing Christ spiritually is the Rock and Foundation upon which He is building His temple, then it follows that what He builds will also be spiritual and invisible; NOT of this earth, but heavenly in nature and in character. However, many have seen only what is earthly and have believed that what Jesus is building is some earthly denomination, church, building, religion or organisation which can be seen and joined. These things are not God's work, but man's work; they are the result of man's desire to build for God which of course sounds like the age-old cry of "Come, let us build ourselves a building with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and be in unity and not scattered over the face of the whole earth." (Gen. 11:4). God is not building on any earthly foundation; flesh and blood cannot reveal this Truth of Who Christ is, only our Father can.

What Did Jesus Do?

I recently watched a BBC documentary about archeological excavations of Sepphoris, the largest city in Judea apart from Jerusalem, and which was only an hour's walk from Nazareth. When Jesus was about nine years old, Herod Antipas initiated a large scale building program in Sepphoris that lasted for twenty years. In this documentary they commented on how all these buildings were made of stone and that it was very likely that Jesus would have helped to build these stone buildings. Clever, religious me thought: "Everybody knows Jesus was a carpenter and not a builder, the Bible says so"! But this documentary said that Jesus may have worked on the buildings

because the Greek word "tekton" which has been translated as "carpenter" in our Bibles, doesn't mean carpenter in the sense we think of it (making furniture etc). Instead it means craftsman and builder and applied to stonemasonry work as well as woodwork. I looked up the Greek word to check this out and found that they were correct. Our English word architect means master builder and is made from two Greek words - archi: meaning chief, and tekton: meaning builder.

Then I thought of how Jesus used so many word pictures and parables of things that both He and others were familiar with, and yet He never *once* gave a parable based on wood and making something from wood. Now that strikes me as rather odd for a carpenter! He could have talked about how a piece of wood is of no practical use (except for being burnt up in a fire!) until and unless the carpenter applies the hammer and chisel and carves something that can be used, but in the process the wood must lose not only the bark that protects it, but also loses its original shape...

Instead we see in the Bible that Jesus used building with stones as examples and images: (Matt 7:24-26, 16:18, 21:33; Mark 15:29; Luke 6:48,49, 12:18, 14:28, John 2:19). It is certainly interesting to think that Jesus would have first been a builder on this earth and that He then applied that experience and knowledge to the spiritual in working with living stones and building HIS Temple/Body! This reference also then has new meaning: "As Jesus was coming out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, Look, Teacher! Notice the sort and quality of these stones and buildings!" (Mark 13:1). If Jesus was a builder and had worked with stones, then this comment makes a lot of sense; the disciples would have thought that He would be interested in the architecture and material of the temple because of His occupation! And the reply Jesus gave is so typical of Him, instead of admiring the architecture and the work of man's hands He instead says "You see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be torn down"! He CAME OUT of the temple made with hands and was not impressed by what was made with human hands.

I asked Father what difference it makes whether we see Jesus as a carpenter or a builder and this is what I felt He showed me... Our established mindsets often prevent us from seeing the bigger picture, and it is the same in this case.

What I saw was the differences between a carpenter and builder. A carpenter typically makes things like furniture to go into a house/structure that SOMEONE ELSE has built, whereas a builder builds the house itself. This is exactly what we see happen with organized religion: Jesus is typically viewed only as a carpenter - someone who just makes the "furniture" that goes into a structure that man builds. Jesus is often seen as simply adding something we need and we then use this "furniture" for our own convenience whether beds, chairs or tables (in spiritual terms those things might be salvation, spiritual gifts and fruits) and the view is selfishly on MAN and his comfort, satisfaction and glory. But if God is viewed as the Master Builder, then the view is considerably different and expanded: it is HIS work and He isn't just making bits of furniture to be placed into a structure built by man, He is building HIS Temple/Body - Christ - and it is all about HIS increase and Glory and Satisfaction!

A house is a much more important and bigger thing than furniture. You can live in a house without furniture, but you wouldn't normally live with just furniture and no house! Furniture, no matter how ornate or useful and practical it may be, is pointless without first being in the House! Furniture can be moved from structure to structure; but a house is never moved but remains firmly placed on the Foundation (1 Cor 3:11-17). A house speaks of a household, family, or home and of protection from the elements of this world; Christ is certainly all of that and more!

Another difference between builders and carpenters is that a carpenter can easily make a piece of furniture all on their own, but builders don't usually work by themselves, they almost always work together with at least one other person. As a builder, Jesus would have known how vital each worker is, and that co-operation and joint participation (koinonia) are important. Stones are very heavy and need people working together to fit them into place. All the pictures He gives us of His spiritual Building are images of inter-relatedness - His Body, His Temple, His City, His Bride - all of these are composites.

A Building Made Without Human Hands

We know that Jesus said: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again." (John 2:19) and Mark records His accusers as stating

that He'd said: "I will destroy this temple which is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, made without hands." (Mark 14:58). A Temple made WITHOUT man's hands... they were correct, this Temple was raised up and is being built by God alone... His work, His do-ing! Anything which is of Him is filled with His Life and death has no power over it! This Temple which Jesus is building is full of His Life and death cannot prevent His building project because He has already conquered death; His Ekklesia (which is the Greek word used in this verse and means "called out ones") are being built and assembled in the heavenlies. This is not something temporal but something eternal and out of this world!

The Scriptures are very clear: the tabernacle and temple of the Old Testament were a symbol and parable until Christ came. "When God speaks of a new covenant, *He makes the first one obsolete (out of use). And what is obsolete (out of use and annulled because of age) is ripe for disappearance and to be dispensed with altogether.* Now even the first covenant had its own rules and regulations for divine worship and it had a sanctuary, but one of this world... Into the second division of the tabernacle none but the high priest goes... *by this the Holy Spirit points out that the way into the true Holy of Holies is not yet thrown open as long as the former tabernacle remains a recognized institution and is still standing.* Seeing that that first tabernacle was a parable (a visible symbol or type or picture of the present age)... *But when Christ appeared as a High Priest of the better things that have come and are to come, then through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not a part of this material creation, He went once for all into the Holy of Holies, not by virtue of the blood of goats and calves, but His own blood, having found and secured a complete redemption (an everlasting release for us). For Christ has not entered into a sanctuary (building) made with human hands, only a copy and pattern and type of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.*" (Heb 8:13, 9:1,7-9,11,12,24 Amplified Bible) "It was Solomon who built a house for Him. However, *the Most High does not dwell in houses and temples made with hands;* as the prophet says, Heaven is My throne, and earth the footstool for My feet. What house can you build for Me, says the Lord, or what is the place in which I can rest? Was it not My hand that made all these things?" (Acts 7:47-50).

The mention of a building "not made with hands" occurs three times in those verses. Our flesh loves having something which WE can make, feel, touch, see, hear and worship here and now on this earth instead of knowing and trusting in the invisible and unseen in the heavenlies. Many continue to believe in and support a Judaistic type of an earthly temple. We typically look at large numbers of people and admire buildings that are large and impressive because those things appeal to our senses and to our image of what we think is worthy of God. But if we learn anything at all from the Scriptures, it is that God does *not* think the way we do - His ways and thoughts are not our ways! He isn't interested in many things being seen and taken notice of, He is interested in only One Thing: Christ being seen and taken account of, "On THIS Rock I will build My Ekklesia". There is only One Thing which can break through the temptation of the many things which can be seen and heard in the here and now, and that One Thing is simply Christ. Once you have seen and experienced the Real, then earthly substitutes lose their grip because there is no comparison between the two!

Our Architect and Builder

"Faith is the assurance of the things we hope for, being the proof of things we do not see and the conviction of their reality. [Abraham] was waiting expectantly and confidently looking forward to the city which has fixed and firm foundations, whose Architect and Builder is God." (Heb 11:1,10). We have evidence all around us of our Architect's absolutely amazing design and creation! Nature everywhere speaks of breathtaking design and planning. But our Architect and Builder builds and creates very differently to how we do. Even at our most creative and most clever, we cannot make objects live, we simply co-operate with the life that is inherent in them. For instance a vine produces grapes and a fruit tree bears fruit not by striving and working hard to bear fruit or grow, it happens because of the life which is in them and it is the same with us. It is Christ and His Life within us which bears fruit and causes us to grow providing we remain (abide) in Him. He is the Vinedresser and will prune us through circumstances and people as He sees fit. Jesus spoke of this in John 15:1-9 and the Greek word which is translated as "abide" means to remain and to wait. We usually do not like waiting; we would rather try to make something happen NOW (made with hands) so we often take things into our own hands - being god and lord of our own lives.

We must be under the government of Jesus Christ and give up trying to govern ourselves. Often we usurp the role of the Holy Spirit by trying to be in control of everything in our lives, but when we yield to Him and allow Him to be our Head, we find that His yoke is easy and His burden is light! We joyfully follow Him and co-operate with Him in His work.

It is interesting that we are called living stones (1 Pet. 2:5) because stones cannot make themselves into anything or move themselves anywhere; they must rely on the Builder to place them and use them in the same way as precious stones must rely upon the Jeweller to place them securely in a setting. The building cannot design itself; it must wait on the Architect's plans. This building cannot build itself; it must wait for the Master Builder. This City is designed and built by God Himself.

One of the prime functions of both architects and builders is to create something from nothing. This City cannot be physically seen and yet is very real! Hebrews again compares the earthly with the heavenly and the Mosaic law with the new covenant: "Jesus has been considered worthy of much greater honor and glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. For every house is built and furnished by someone, but the Builder of all things is God." (Heb 3:3,4). Until people see this Ekklesia that Jesus is building, they often unknowingly give the former house more honour than the Builder, not realizing that that house was something temporal and not eternal and pointed to something of far greater worth: Jesus as not only the Builder but also the Temple! A house or temple on this earth, whether it is called a church or not, is a dead structure because it is the BUILDER that is full of Life and He is now building His Temple in the heavenlies with living stones/people who are full of His Life and Light!

May our eyes be opened to see Jesus Christ and the Ekklesia which He is building and may we learn to co-operate and work with Him as the Architect and Master Builder of all!

"In Him the whole structure is joined (bound, welded) together harmoniously, and it continues to rise, grow and increase into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him you yourselves also are being built up with the rest, to form a fixed abode (dwelling place) of God in (by, through) the Spirit." (Eph 2:19-22 Amplified Bible).



Jesus... but not as we've known Him

"Since you don't know who I am, you don't know who My Father is. If you knew Me, you would also know My Father." (John 8:19)

One of the first things we learn as we begin to know Christ is that we have to unlearn many things. This includes things we have believed about who Jesus is.

In 2005 I wrote the previous article, "Building... But Not As We've Known It" where I looked into the common belief that Jesus was a carpenter and discovered that instead He was a builder who worked with stone. A book I read recently, "The Jesus Discovery" by Dr Adam Bradford, affirmed this and reveals even more misconceptions that can result from our Western mindsets.

The author says that the accounts of Jesus' life (by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) were proving to the people of the day that Jesus was truly the Son of God - they already knew who Jesus was as a man. We, on the other hand, are in the opposite position: we know Jesus as the Son of God, but have largely lost sight of Jesus as the Son of Man....

"The Son of Man" was Christ's favourite term for Himself, it's recorded 80 times. This suggests it was important to Him that He came from man, as well as from God - He was not only the Creator, but also the Creation! If it were us, I'm sure we would choose to call ourselves "the Son of God" instead of "the Son of Man", and yet Jesus honoured His creation by preferring this title. He was fully a man, and yet a man full of the Spirit of God. We tend to think of Him only in terms of His divinity, but there is value in knowing Him in His humanity also.

For years now I have longed to know and see Jesus Christ as He really is; not as the church think He is, not as many Christians think He is, not as I think He is, but as He REALLY is. I'm not writing this article to tell

you all I have seen of Him - I still see so little - instead I'm writing to encourage you to see and know Him even more truly *yourself*, even if that means challenging Who you thought He was. We often need to be challenged in order to be changed.

Hundreds of years of accumulated myths, traditions and mistranslations have very effectively brainwashed us into believing things about this Man that simply aren't true. We need Him to come into each of our temples and overturn the tables of lies and misconceptions, drive out all that is wrong, and reveal what is true.

One of these misconceptions is that Jesus was an uneducated man. To the contrary, He is likely to have been one of the most educated Rabbis of the day. If Jesus was not educated and trained as a Rabbi, He would not have had either the ability to read or *permission* to read from the sacred scrolls in the synagogue (Luke 4), or teach every day in the temple in Jerusalem (Luke 19:47). It would not have been allowed. He would have been arrested by the temple guards. Nor would the religious leaders have called Jesus "Rabbi" if Jesus wasn't in fact a Rabbi.

In John 3 we see one of the religious leaders, Nicodemus, saying to Jesus, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God...." Two different words were used: "Rabbi" and "teacher" (didaskalos). "Rabbi" doesn't simply mean "teacher"; the Greek word "didaskalos" means "teacher". Every single translation of the Bible calls Jesus a Rabbi in this verse; it is there in plain sight and the term was used of Him fourteen times.

In Jewish culture the term "Rabbi" was, and still is, a *title* given after completing extensive rabbinic study over the course of many years. Rabbis in those days were not priests, they were interpreters and expounders of the Scriptures in addition to having a full-time occupation to support themselves. They would typically work for a third of the day, and then study. According to the Jewish Encyclopedia a Rabbi is a "Hebrew term used as a title for those who are distinguished for learning, who are the authoritative teachers of the Law, and who are the appointed spiritual heads of the community."

So, why does it matter whether Jesus was educated as a Rabbi? Here is

why it matters to me:

1. I want to know who Jesus really is, and I want to know Him as the Son of Man, as well as knowing Him as the Son of God.

2. This challenges those who believe that Jesus didn't study the Scriptures and use that as a reason for minimising our need for the Scriptures today. Not only did Jesus know the Scriptures (and very thoroughly) but He had at least the five books of Moses memorised, as all Jewish boys did. Education was important to the Jewish people of the time and so were the Scriptures. From the ages of 5-10 all Jewish boys memorised the Torah at the synagogue, as many still do today. From ages 10-12 they learned the Mishnah (the oral law), and after that the Talmud. The rabbinic Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) says: "At five years of age, one is ready for the study of the Written Torah, at ten years of age for the study of the Oral Torah [Mishnah], at thirteen for bar mitzvah, fifteen for the study of Talmud..." (Avot 5:22). *This was an integral part of the culture that Jesus grew up in* - they were very religious people.

3. Understanding the requirements of Jewish and rabbinic education explains what Jesus was doing between the ages of 12-30. There is no mention of His education in the Bible, probably because everybody in that time period knew *exactly* what He would have been doing until He was 30: that was the official age when Rabbis began to gather disciples, just as Jesus did. When the accounts of His life were written many years later, they probably thought it superfluous to detail the training they all knew Jesus had; it would have seemed like a waste of precious writing materials and time. And after His seeming blasphemy and betrayal of them, the Rabbis would have been sure to omit any record of Him ever having been a Rabbi.

4. This also explains why the religious leaders were so upset with Jesus and wanted to crucify Him. He had seemingly turned His back on them and on all His religious training. As a previously highly respected teacher of the Law, Jesus was claiming that He Himself was greater than the Law, greater than the temple, claiming that God was His Father. Not only that, but He had the audacity to teach others this "heresy" in the temple where He was legitimately allowed to teach! They would have been

furious; not only because He claimed that God was His Father or because He broke their laws, but because He spoke against *them* and their religion, and they felt helpless to stop Him. They would have felt that He had betrayed them.

5. Knowing that Jesus was a Rabbi confirmed for me what I've written elsewhere; that He repented from missing the mark with their religion and left it to do what His Father wanted. This was the point when the "trouble" began, both with His spiritual enemy and His earthly religious enemies:

John's baptism was different to other immersions of the day because John's immersion was not a prescribed immersion for ceremonial cleansing but was one of repentance... So *why* did Jesus need this symbolic baptism of repentance - an immersion signifying a change of mind? Why would this holy Man, who had not sinned, be required by God to be ceremonially washed for repentance? What did Jesus have to repent of (meaning to have a change of mind) that would make this act necessary from God's perspective? It could well be that Jesus was repenting and turning away from one thing that He had done perfectly up until this point: *keeping the Jewish Law!* He had been subject to the laws of the Torah and this "baptism of repentance" revealed His *death* to all of that, and His rising to a new covenant, a new Way, a new Life in and of the Spirit for Him, and later (through the Cross) for every one of us. His baptism revealed an inward death to the old covenant and an inward rising to new Life... It was a sign before God of Him finally *completing and fulfilling the Law* and dying to that Law and Covenant/Contract and being raised into the new Law of Life and liberty in the Spirit with the new contract - resulting in an opened heaven. (from "Baptism... But Not As We've Known It").

Accepting Jesus

Many Christians talk about "accepting Jesus" when in fact they haven't accepted Jesus, but instead have accepted a religious construct. Others claim to have accepted Jesus, but have often accepted a self-made god; a "Jesus" who is made in the person's own image, according to what they like and don't like. And *He is not recognisable as the Jesus of the Bible*. "You happily put up with whatever anyone tells you, even if they preach a

different Jesus than the one we preach, or a different kind of Spirit than the one you received, or a different kind of gospel than the one you believed." (2 Cor. 11:4).

Jesus said difficult, offensive, even harsh things to others, including His disciples. That challenges what many believe about Jesus today. He called Peter a devil, telling him he was offensive and that He didn't know God (Matt. 16:23). He told His disciples that they had very little faith and trust (Matt. 8:26; 14:31; 16:8) and said to them, "Don't you see or understand yet? Have your hearts been made like stone? You have eyes - don't you see? You have ears - don't you hear? And don't you remember?" (Mark 8:17,18). To two of His disciples He said: "How foolish you are! You're so slow to believe everything the prophets said!" (Luke 24:25).

Jesus offended many people, even His own followers (John 6:60-61). As Scripture says, "I am placing a Rock in Zion that people trip over, *a large Rock that people find offensive*" (Isaiah 8:14). Both Paul and Peter used that Scripture in reference to Christ (Rom. 9:33, 1 Pet. 2:8). We need to be careful that we aren't offended or tripped up by Jesus today, just because He may not fit our ideals of what we think Christ should be like. He didn't fit the ideals of what many of the Jews were looking for in a Messiah either - He was rejected and not accepted by most - the real Jesus was deemed unacceptable, and this is still the case with many today.

The Jewish leaders who studied the Scriptures and knew them best of all didn't have the Holy Spirit - they relied on themselves and their own understanding and so they didn't recognise Jesus. We, on the other hand, are in the opposite position: many of us today know the Holy Spirit, but *do not know the Scriptures and so we may not recognise the real Jesus either!* He still asks, "Aren't you deceived for this reason, because you don't know the Scriptures or the power of God?" (Mark 12:24). He didn't say, "Aren't you deceived because you don't know the Holy Spirit?" but "*because you don't know the Scriptures or the power of God!*"

I don't idolise the Bible, but I do recognise it as one of the ways that God speaks to us and through which Jesus is revealed. It used to be a dead book to me, but when I was brought to Life in Christ, this book also

became alive. I began to see and hear Christ through it like no other book. *The book wasn't the problem, it was the reader (me) that was the problem!* I needed to have my eyes opened to see. You can't read a book if you are blind. I needed the veil that was covering the eyes of my understanding removed (Eph. 1:17-21) and *then* I could see and recognise Christ and His Life in the words.

Jesus Himself said that the Scriptures speak of Him (John 5:39). Whereas many of the early believers (particularly the females) would have been illiterate, they still would have had a comprehensive knowledge of the Scriptures - they heard them every Sabbath and feast day and had many of them memorised. We, today, have no excuse like illiteracy for not knowing the Scriptures or Christ, and it is very clear from what people today say of Jesus that *many do not know either Him or the Scriptures....*

The early believers needed a strong emphasis on the Holy Spirit because He had just been given, and they were used to relying on their own knowledge of the Scriptures and the Rabbi's interpretations instead of on the Holy Spirit. We, on the other hand, while maintaining our vital dependence on the Holy Spirit and knowing Him as our Teacher, have often not known, disdained, treated as unnecessary, and even brought into disrepute the very Scriptures that speak of the Jesus we claim to know and love!

Even though Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit, and was the Word of God Himself, *He still read, honoured and quoted from the Scriptures*, and by "Scriptures" I mean the Tanakh, what we call the Old Testament. Jesus *never once* showed disrespect for the Scriptures. Please *hear* what He said: "Don't ever think that I came to set aside Moses' Teachings or the Prophets. *I didn't come to set them aside but to make them come true.* I can guarantee this truth: Until the earth and the heavens disappear, neither a period nor a comma will disappear from the Scriptures before everything has come true." (Matt. 5:17,18).

The God of the Scriptures (in what is called the Old Testament) is the *same God as today*. Jesus and His Father are One. God didn't suddenly change - what did change was the agreement (contract) that He had made, because it was fulfilled and completed with the Man Jesus. Every

legal requirement of the original agreement was fulfilled and satisfied in God's Man and so a new contract was introduced. While the standards and requirements of God had not changed, He introduced a new Way of *meeting those requirements*: through this Man... Christ Jesus. Through trusting this Man, all of mankind can now know God. He introduced a new law, a new covenant, a new contract. This new law is called the law of liberty, but it is still a contract that can be broken from our end.

In any contract or agreement, there are two parties and both are responsible. In this New Covenant/Contract we are responsible for our side of the agreement; not as a matter of works that we must do out of duty, but as a matter of *sheer faithfulness, obedience and love!* God doesn't tell us to do something unless it is important: "God has commanded all men to repent (Acts 17:30). It is a work which only they can do. It is morally impossible for one person to repent for another. Even Christ could not do this. He could die for us, but He cannot do our repenting for us." (A. W. Tozer, "Paths to Power").

There are many statements in the Bible that begin with the *conditional* particle "*IF...*" meaning that *we are responsible to do something*. Jesus said, "*If you* remain in these words of Mine you are really My disciples *then* you will know the Truth and the Truth will set you free... *If you* remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit... *If you* keep My commands, you will remain in My love... *If you* really know Me, you will know My Father as well..." (John 8:31; 15:5,10; 14:7).

If you know Him, you will know His Father as well...

Accepting the Father of Jesus

As a good Father, God is very faithful with us: meaning that He is loving and yet firm when necessary, and disciplines and trains us. Just as babies gradually get to know who their parents are, so as newborns we gradually get to know who our Father is - we learn what is acceptable to Him and what is unacceptable and what we need to do. As Peter wrote, "He doesn't want to destroy anyone but wants all people to have an opportunity to turn to Him and *change the way they think and act.*" (2 Pet. 3:9).

So who is God? Due to what we have believed, some of us need to discover His love, mercy, and kindness, while others of us need to learn His holiness, justice, and truth. His love and mercy are far bigger than we can imagine, and so are His justice and holiness. How many of us are learning to know and love Him *for who He really is*? How many love Him because He is holy? How many love Him because He is our judge? How many read the Scriptures to see Him as He *really* is?

Apart from the Holy Spirit revealing Him, God is Unknowable! To know He exists at all requires a step of faith. When Moses asked God who he should say had sent him, God said, "I Am Who I Am. Say this to the people of Israel: I Am has sent me to you." That doesn't make much sense in English. The Hebrew word "Hayah" that has been translated as "I Am" in Ex. 3:14, isn't translated as "I am" anywhere else so I thought it warranted looking into and discovered that it could equally be interpreted as: "I exist!"

A lot of people wonder if God really does exist, and here He says to tell the people: "*I exist*, so I exist"! Yah-weh means "He exists" as opposed to "Ha-yah" meaning "I exist". It seems odd that the translators, who would have known what Yah-weh meant, didn't then translate Ha-yah as "I exist".

Part of the romance of loving God is knowing how absolutely beyond us He is - that His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts - and discovering Him as He actually is. I want to learn who He really is, not so that I accumulate mere head knowledge, but so I can *love and know Him more truly in my heart*. "The Greeks learned in order to comprehend. The Hebrews learned in order to revere. The modern man learns in order to use." (Abraham Heschel). We can never fully comprehend God, nor should we try to use God for our own ends and shape Him to fit our ideas; instead, as we learn Who He really is, our love and reverence for Him increases.

We delight in God's love for us, it makes us feel good, but when it comes to us loving God, instead of accepting Him and loving God *as the Scriptures reveal Him to be*, even if we don't understand Him, many reject Him and instead make a god after their own image: one they can

easily understand, love, and worship. If you love going to church, then your "God" does too. Whatever you love, your "God" loves too (very conveniently!).

The reverse is also true: what you don't like, you believe that God doesn't like too. If you don't like being accountable or responsible, then your "God" doesn't hold you to account. If you don't like to feel convicted, then "God" doesn't ever show you what is wrong in your life, you're perfectly acceptable no matter what you do or say. If you don't like what you read in the Bible, then "God" doesn't like it either; instead you tell yourself that the book is an idol, not inspired by God, and must be avoided. And once you no longer accept that the Scriptures are important, then everything is judged by what YOU believe to be right instead. You set *yourself* up as judge and king in place of God (Judges 21:25). Instead of searching the Scriptures to see if what you hear is true (Acts 17:11), you search yourself to see whether you *like* what you hear or not, and reject or accept on that basis.

Once people begin to go down this track of creating and worshiping their own god, they become very difficult to reach - they love their own god too much and will reject *anything* that does not sound like what they (ie their god!) would say or approve of. If you point out this deception, you may be judged as being unloving (even though real Love always points out where we have missed the mark); called judgmental (even though real Love judges and discriminates between what is good and bad); and accused of being condemning (even though real Love does condemn whatever will kill its relationship).

The seduction, the deception, and the bondage, are diabolical and very real. "I implore you... to keep a watchful eye on those who cause trouble and make difficulties among you, in plain opposition to the teaching you have been given, and steer clear of them. Such men do not really serve our Lord Jesus Christ at all but are utterly self-centred. Yet with their plausible and attractive arguments they deceive those who are too simple-hearted to see through them." (Rom. 16:17,18).

Not only is knowing the Father of Jesus vital, so is knowing the Spirit of the Man...

Accepting the Spirit of Jesus

Another name for Jesus is "the Holy One of God" and as His followers, most of us claim to be filled with His Spirit of Holiness. Jesus Himself told us exactly what His Spirit does: "When He has come, He will *convict* the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of *judgment*" (John 16:8). He convicts of missing the mark, He convicts of what is right and just, and He convicts about what God has judged. There is only one word in the Greek that is translated in our Bibles as "convict, reprove, rebuke, correct" - they all mean the *same thing* even though in English they may mean different things to us. And this word for convicting, rebuking, correcting is used of the Holy Spirit. One of His prime functions is to: "*convict... of judgment*".

There is also only one root word in the Greek that is translated in our Bibles as the words "judge, discern, discriminate" - they all mean the *same thing* in the Greek. Real Love, the Love of God, discriminates and judges against all that will separate us from Him and calls us out of ourselves and into Himself. This means changing our minds (repenting) and leaving a lot of things that we may not *want* to leave! It means a change of heart: wanting what He wants instead of what I want.

In the New Testament the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Holiness, the Spirit of Glory, the Spirit of Faith, the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation, the Spirit of Truth (5 times) and the Spirit of Grace (once).

The one time He is referred to as the Spirit of Grace is: "Anyone who violates the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severe punishment do you think that person deserves who tramples on God's Son, treats as common the blood of the covenant by which it was sanctified, and insults the Spirit of grace? For we know the one who said, 'Vengeance belongs to Me, I will pay them back,' and again, 'The Lord will judge His people.'" (Heb. 10:28-30).

Now that doesn't sound much like what is believed and taught about either the Spirit of Grace or Jesus today. So does the Bible need to be adjusted to fit our concepts of Jesus, or is it *us* who need to be adjusted?

What many believe to be grace, is often not the Grace that is described in the Bible.

"Consider how you would respond to a message exhorting you to *"guard your mind, stay sober, be obedient, don't be conformed to your former lusts, be holy, conduct yourself in fear, obey the Word and put aside all malice, guile, hypocrisy etc."* If the message went on to tell you to *"love and read God's Word, grow up, tell others about God's goodness, avoid fleshly lusts, do good deeds, do right, don't speak about evil, be zealous for what is good, and sanctify Christ as Lord."* Many within the Body of Christ today would cry out against such a message claiming it to be nothing more than a religious spirit or legalism or even fleshly works. Grace we are told frees you from all these works and liberates you so that you are no longer under any obligation of any kind. Grace, they say, is the gift that comes to us with no strings attached. But is that really the message of grace? Has the enemy blinded our eyes through *super-sizing* the true message of grace, and thereby distorting it? It may surprise you to know that all the exhortations I've listed in italics were taken directly from Peter's first epistle. Now here is a most amazing truth. Peter tells us in the closing verses of his epistle: "I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that THIS is THE TRUE GRACE OF GOD. STAND FIRM IN IT!" Here we have one of the most complete and comprehensive revelations on TRUE GRACE to be found in the New Testament. Yes, grace is totally and irrevocably free; and provides us with God's power to change us. That was its original intent. Paul in his letter to Titus explains it this way: "The grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all men, *instructing us* to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age." (Titus 2:11-12) Peter and Paul saw the Lord, who is the only true embodiment of grace and truth. If anyone had a correct revelation and understanding of grace these two men certainly did." ([David Ravenhill](#)).

Grace is precious and of infinite value, *but so is Truth*. The two must go together. The Spirit of Jesus is full of Grace *and* Truth (John 1:14,17). Everybody loves Grace, but Truth may not be as popular as Grace, perhaps because Truth is often corrective; it exposes lies.

We mustn't naively think we can have grace without truth and assume that "grace" will "cover" our sinful choices and selfish decisions. That is not "walking in the Spirit" or being governed by the Spirit; that is being governed and controlled by Self. This journey out of religion is not meant to be a journey into Self, but out of Self and *into Christ*. "Since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, *let us have grace by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear*. For our God is a consuming fire." (Heb. 12:28).

We are all responsible and accountable for our choices and actions, and for what we accept or reject. That is very clear, not only in our lives, but in the Scriptures also. King David still lost a son as a consequence of his sin, even after he had repented. And the result of Abraham's impatience in not waiting for Isaac was not without very serious consequences; we still live with the descendants of Ishmael and the resulting religion of Islam today.

I know that some may judge, reject and condemn what I write here simply because it may not line up with what they like, or personally think is right, or what they are comfortable with. But feeling uncomfortable can lead to conviction, and conviction can lead to *conversion*: converting us to God's ways and thoughts instead of our own. God shows us His Standard so we can see where we have missed the mark, we then rightly feel convicted, and this enables us to make a choice: either to humble ourselves, see where we are wrong, change our mind, be adjusted, agree with what God says and live in Truth, OR... we reject the thought that we may be wrong, reject what God reveals to be true about us, and we choose to deceive ourselves and live a lie. It is our choice.

There is no point in thinking that Jesus is in agreement with all *our* thoughts of Him and His Father and His Spirit; it is *us* that have to be in agreement with all of HIS thoughts, not the other way around! "The purpose of revelation is not to SUBSTANTIATE your illusions, but to ELIMINATE them. Do not seek confirmation from God as to your thoughts and your perception of things, but seek instead to be disillusioned; seek to be rid of all your illusions about God, all your misperceptions and misconceptions about Who He is and what He is doing." (Chip Brogden).

God and His character aren't going to change; it is we who must change. I don't know about you, but I don't want to believe things about God that aren't true! I need *my mind changed and renewed* so that my thoughts and ways are adjusted to come into alignment with His thoughts and ways. We each need Christ to be revealed to us.

Jesus still asks, "*Who do you say I am?*" (Matt. 16:15). We desperately need Him to *show us* who He is because we can't see Him or know who He is according to what we think or what somebody else says - nobody else can see Him or know Him for you. And we can't see Him unless our blind eyes are healed. Another question Jesus still asks is, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And our response and experience can be that of the blind men in Matthew 20: "'Lord,' they said to Him, '*open our eyes!*'" Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they could see, and they followed Him."

Each of us need this "Emmaus Road" experience, "Jesus explained to them what was said about Himself in all the Scriptures, beginning with the books of Moses and the writings of all the prophets... He sat down to eat with them, took the bread, and said the blessing; then He broke the bread and gave it to them. *Then their eyes were opened and they recognised Him...*"

Jesus hadn't changed - He was still exactly Who He has always been. The Scriptures hadn't changed - they were still exactly as they had been. It was THEM that had changed! Are we willing to be changed? Are we willing to admit we are wrong, change our mind, and be adjusted according to the Light?

We desperately need to be changed and have our eyes opened to see. Then we will also be able to say to each other, "Wasn't it like a fire burning in us when He talked to us... and explained the Scriptures to us?" We, today, can have this same experience: having our eyes opened to know and see the real Jesus, being *changed*, having Him explain the Scriptures like a fire burning in us, with the same result that we too tell others what we have seen, "Jesus is alive!"

"And so, dear friends, since you already know these things,

continuously be on your guard not to be carried away by the deception of lawless people. Otherwise, you may fall from your secure position. Instead, continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Messiah." (2 Peter 3:17,18)



Prayer Letter... but not as we've known it

Dear One,

I have received quite a number of prayer letters over the past couple of months, with prayers (petitions) addressed to many people, telling us what to pray and give praise for... With some it is good to read their news, but these letters don't usually make me feel part of their lives; instead they often make me feel like an outsider. Why is this?

Is it because the letters are impersonal and therefore not relational and real? Is it because often people (and their support) are being sought instead of You? Is it because it often looks like soliciting and marketing for "support" instead of trusting You? Is it because people appear to have more trust and faith in MANY people praying than in trusting You to lead whoever You want praying? Is it because it is Your role to lead us what to pray and for whom? Is it because so often the unspoken implication of these letters is that the ones writing are more worthy of and thus require more prayer than others?

Oh Father... is this just me or is this Your heart I am feeling? Why does this grieve me so much? Why do I see things so differently to others? Many would be offended by me even asking such questions...

We have a list of "contacts" and personal friends that I could send a prayer letter to, but YOU are the One I pray to and You are the One Who leads me to pray, and who am I to tell Your children what they should be praying for? I desire for all of us to be praying with You and through You rather than being motivated by what we think or write. I could not begin to tell someone what to pray for me and my family because I just do not know. If I have learned anything in living with You, it is that You so often surprise me and do things so differently than I would expect! Often what You know I most desperately need is not at all what I would pray or ask prayer for in difficult situations, so why would I trust my own judgment and tell others what ought to be prayed for me or somebody else?

Many times I have known You prompting to pray for someone and have prayed with You for that person before they even mentioned their need, and You have done the same thing in prompting friends to pray for me, so I trust You to lead us to pray and to give us the words You want us to pray, when You need us to... I know how desperately I need prayer; thank You so much that You always provide all that I need! I love what you had Paul write: "He who did not withhold or spare even His own Son but gave Him for us all, will He not also with Him freely and graciously give us all things... He Who is at the right hand of God actually pleading as He intercedes for us? Who shall ever separate us from Christ's Love? Shall suffering and affliction and tribulation? Or calamity and distress?"

And what about my brothers and sisters who feel alone and may not have anyone to write to about their trials and triumphs... how do these prayer letters make them feel? Are they, and their ministry to You in private, any less important than those who "minister" to many people in Your Name and receive lots of "support"? I know that their hidden ministry to You is precious and treasured; so Father, please keep these ones hidden in You, and please strengthen, encourage and reward them with Yourself. May they know without a doubt that they are vital members of this Family and that we are all equal in Your sight. Not one of us is more special than another, we are all one in You and what affects one affects all.

I'm not saying that we shouldn't share things because I know that You want us to share our trials and triumphs with each other! But I see that sharing those things is something that naturally occurs with people I know intimately, as opposed to people with whom I don't have a close REAL-ationship. Often You lead us to pray for each other through this personal sharing and connecting of lives and that feels real whereas the sharing in a prayer letter somehow feels false, artificial and contrived to me...

Father, I even find the "points for praise" in these letters upsetting because the focus seems to be on these people and their "ministry" rather than on You... I guess thus engendering further support from people. It feels so manipulative, religious, and unreal. Are they truly giving You ALL the glory and credit or are they delighting in "being used of God" and is that feeding their flesh? Oh Father... how can we even

think of "having a ministry" when all true ministry is Yours and not ours?

Dear Father, please forgive us for those times when we unknowingly promote ourselves. Forgive us for deceiving ourselves and feeding our pride under the guise of being used by You. Please forgive us for trying to make things happen ourselves instead of waiting on You and trusting You. Please forgive us for the times when we have tried to manipulate others into doing what we think they should without knowing Your heart and without trusting You with them. Oh Father, forgive us for being so selfish, self centred and self promoting. Please forgive us for insinuating ourselves and our ideas into what is holy. Please give us a clear vision of what You desire and please help us to settle for nothing less than that. Please cleanse us and make us a holy people, without mixture, pure and worthy of being Your children... Please forgive me if I am viewing these things through my own eyes instead of Yours, and please continue to reveal and show me more of Yourself and what You see...

Father, please open our eyes to see that we are free in You; that we are free from the bondages of religion and man's methods, traditions and ordinances! Free from doing what WE think we ought to do and free from doing what others want us to do! Free to do and be all that YOU want! Free from comparing ourselves with others and earning brownie points! Free from the bondages of insecurity because we are secure and thoroughly loved in You - not because of what we do or have done, but simply because of Who YOU are!

Many of these prayer letters talk about what people are going to do in 2005 and I don't even know what You have in mind for us to do tomorrow let alone this year! Father, although I don't know what this year holds for us yet, I absolutely delight and rest in knowing that You know exactly what is ahead and that You will be there with me to lead me through every moment of it. Thank You so much for that... I could not get through one minute without You; You are my Breath, my Life and my Heart; my World!

Well, Father, I guess I should end this "prayer letter" the same way that all good prayer letters end: thanking You for Your continued prayers and support! :-) You know how desperately I need You interceding for me; this letter is probably a very good example of why You must!!! Thank You

so much for Your intercession and for Your never-ending, persistent Love for me.

Yours forever,
Lynette

"The Holy Spirit comes to our aid and bears us up in our weakness; for we do not know what prayer to offer nor how to offer it worthily as we ought, but the Spirit Himself goes to meet our supplication and pleads in our behalf with unspeakable yearnings and groanings too deep for utterance. And He who searches the hearts of men knows what is in the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes and pleads before God in behalf of the saints according to and in harmony with God's will. We are assured and know that all things work together and are fitting into a plan for good to and for those who love God and are called according to His design and Purpose."

Romans 8:26-28.



Living by Faith... but not as we've known it

"For in Christ, neither our most conscientious religion nor disregard of religion amounts to anything. What matters is something far more interior: faith expressed in love." (Gal. 5:6, *The Message*)

When we hear the term "living by faith" we usually think of people who have felt called to stop working in their vocation and to 'live by faith'; expecting God to provide for their financial and physical needs. I have no doubt that our Father can and does provide for those whom He leads to live by faith in this way because I never knew anything else as a child and young adult. My parents were called to the missionfield when I was three and they sold their new house and belongings so they could go. The interdenominational mission that we were with was a "faith mission" and had the policy of not asking people for money or things that were needed, but asking only God. We saw Father provide for us time and time again and we not only had all we ever needed, but also (from a child's perspective) even things that I wanted. He proved His faithfulness time and time again. I also know friends who felt called to live by faith and their experience was a disaster!

I believe that God's grace was operating in both cases - but in quite different ways, because we are all called to live by faith, but not necessarily like either of the two examples I've given. We are all called to live by, through, in Faith, which is Christ. Faith is not a thing that needs to be stirred up or proclaimed; Faith is a Person and when you are in Him, you are living by Him and His Life and that IS living by/in/through Faith! Living in Him means you own nothing - even "your" faith comes from Him - and yet in having nothing but Christ, you have Everything.

Our Life in Him begins with Faith and is continued every moment by Faith - not by OUR faith but by His Faith. This Life and this Faith is not something we can bring into existence; it can only come from being born from above and having our source of Life in Christ. No religious rituals, statements of faith or sinner's prayers can make that happen; this Life

must be born of GOD and not us! It is HE who chooses us, we do not "make a choice for Christ" - it is all of Him and it is all Grace: "You did not choose Me, but I chose YOU" (John 15:16). Was I born because I decided and chose to be born? Did my birth and entrance into this world have anything at all to do with me? Clearly the answer is no, and it is exactly the same with being 'born again'! If it is us that "makes a decision for Christ" then we are relying on ourselves and our flesh and our WORKS and self-effort and self-righteousness because that would mean that my birth was dependent on me and my flesh instead of on God and His Spirit.

It is a humbling thing to realize that this "choice" was simply a response to already having been chosen! If being born from above had anything to do with me then I could claim the credit and the glory for it and it would make me proud and self-righteous. As it is, this new Life was born of God and came from Him and He receives all the credit and glory for having brought forth Life! Just as a little baby did not ask to be born and has no understanding for some time after their birth, so we too often do not understand for some time what has happened to us, we simply know that we are alive and are experiencing Life. Our faith and understanding do not cause us to be born from above; rather we have faith and understanding because we were born and because Christ lives within us.

Living by faith in the traditional understanding of the term means stopping work for which we receive reward or reimbursement and instead seeing God provide. Living by faith in our spiritual, unseen life also means STOPPING our work done in our own strength and waiting on God to provide for all our needs in His time and way. We no longer look for any reward from our work here on this earth and instead know Christ as our Reward! This is illustrated in Matthew 6 where three times the phrase "Truly I tell you, they have their reward in full already" is repeated in reference to those who look like they are doing exactly what God would want them to: praying, giving and fasting. Yet because the unseen motivation for doing those things was from the flesh, it was rewarding their self-righteousness and their reward was the approval of man and the loss of the approval and reward of God. The contrast in these verses (1-8, 16-18) is between what is seen by man and what is unseen by man; because all is seen by God Who knows the motivations of our hearts. Praying, giving and fasting can all be motivated by needs that WE see

and that we respond to in the flesh rather than being led by the Spirit - it is not those who pray, give and fast that are called the sons of God but those who know and are led by the Spirit (Rom 8:14).

"If then you have died with Christ to material ways of looking at things and have escaped the world's crude and elemental notions and teachings of externalism, why do you live as if you still belong to the world? ...To do this is to follow human precepts and doctrines. Such practices have indeed the outward appearance that popularly passes for wisdom, in promoting SELF-imposed rigor of devotion and delight in SELF-humiliation and severity of discipline of the body, but they are of NO value in checking the indulgence of the flesh. Instead, they do not honor God but serve only to indulge the (religious) flesh." (Col. 2:20,22,23). Obviously there is nothing wrong with praying, giving and fasting; they are good things to do providing they are initiated by our Life in Christ and not by our flesh! Too often we are led by circumstances, needs and what we see instead of simply being led by the Spirit. God is always more interested in our hearts (the unseen internal) than our actions (the seen externals) because right actions never mean a right heart whereas a right heart will result in right actions. And so too with this issue of living by faith: it is not about the seen but the unseen (Heb. 11:1; 2 Cor. 4:18).

This living by Faith must start with our being born from above; not because we have signed our own birth certificate or decided to be born, but because the Light has shined into our hearts and revealed Who and what Life really is all about and Who our Father is. Death must precede resurrection Life; stopping our own work and not relying on ourselves and our wisdom will not happen unless we die to ourselves. We often do not submit to this death which brings Life because we are so used to doing things in our own strength and being "in control" of as much as possible in our lives - that is the only "life" we have ever known!

The opposite of faith is not unbelief, or distrust, but FEAR. Both faith and fear are unseen but nevertheless very real! Fear is the logical result of doing things in our own strength and thinking we are in control, because the truth is that we are not, and never have been, in control. Fear often arises when things beyond our control affect us. When we have our security and trust in ourselves, when we rely on Self for our judgments,

our happiness, our fulfillment, even our salvation, then it is all based in us and our flesh and when a storm comes we are rightly afraid, because we have built our house upon sand and we cannot control the weather. It is a battle for Life because fear is associated with death whereas faith is associated with Life and our fears show very clearly where our trust and faith and real life are - whether here or above. The more we know in our heart that we are born from above and that our real Life is there with Christ seated in the heavenlies, the less the things of this earth will cause us to fear because we are living in and by Faith, Who is Christ! HE is our Rock and He dispels our fears and trembling and brings stability and assurance because He is Love!

The question becomes: Can we fully, really trust God??? Of course we know the answer to that in our heads, but do we KNOW the Answer as Truth and reality in our hearts? Even if we know in our heads that He is absolutely trustworthy and faithful, we still cannot trust Him completely unless His Faith and Love are overcoming the fear inherent in us. We are either trusting God and living by Faith, or we are trusting ourselves and living by fear. So how do we experience this Faith that casts out fear? By seeing Truth; not only Truth in Christ, but also the truth about ourselves: that in us, in our flesh, there is no good thing and that not one of us is righteous. When we see who He is and who we are, He enables us to give up on ourselves and quit trusting ourselves and instead we lay down our lives and see Christ's Life in us instead. We die, He lives. Fear dies, Faith lives.

So is living by Faith easy? Yes and no! It is easy if we look up and see the unseen and know Christ as our Rest and our All and know the fact that He is GOD and can do anything! And it is not easy if we look down and see the seen and what appears to be facts that are larger than life. It becomes a matter of where we are focussing and whether our gaze is fixed on Jesus or on Self. It is not a matter of denying reality and claiming promises or making proclamations of faith (which are all works of the flesh because WE are trying to make something happen) but it is seeing and acknowledging the reality, hopelessness and impossibilities of life here on earth even while having absolute trust and faith in knowing that God is in complete control over it all. This is not something WE can do; it must be done by Faith, Christ!

We so often say or sing "He is Lord" but do our actions and words prove that fact? When we really do know Him as the Lord and Sovereign Ruler and King of our personal kingdom, then we give up our right to rule and make things happen in our lives; our kingdom has been handed over to Another and HE rules - we live in His Kingdom. We are utterly dependent upon Him and act and speak and move only as He and His Life within us directs. Fear usually rises when we realize that we are not in control of something, but when we know He is in control - not only knowing it in our head but KNOWING it as a fact in our hearts - then Faith drives out all fear. So often we think we know something but it may be merely a mental apprehension of knowledge and we don't need more of that kind of knowledge. We don't need to know someTHING but someONE - things are inanimate and do not contain Life. Christ IS Life and when Father brings forth His Life in us and we are born from above THEN we truly know in our heart and know by the spirit - it is Life and it is Truth - and we finally see, hear and understand as we are given new eyes, ears and heart! Our head knowledge often gets in the way because we THINK we know even when our heart does not and this can prevent us from receiving further revelation and unveiling from above. There is a world of difference between head knowledge and heart knowledge when it comes to knowing Christ.

He longs for us to really know Him... to know Him as our Everything and All, to know Him not because He brings Faith, Peace, Rest, Love and all that He is, but to know the reality of those aspects of Him in our lives simply because in the first place we know HIM! May we be those who know Him and love Him and live with Him not because of what He can give us but simply because He IS All and Everything; our Life, our Love, our Faith!

"Whatever former things I had that might have been gains to me, I have come to consider as loss for Christ's sake. Yes, I count everything as loss compared to the priceless privilege of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord and of progressively becoming more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him. For His sake I have lost everything and consider it all mere rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and that I may be found and known as in Him, not having any self-achieved righteousness that can be called my own, based on my obedience to the Law's demands, but possessing that which

comes through faith in Christ, the right standing with God which comes from God by faith." (Phil. 3:8,9).



Observing the Sabbath... but not as we've known it

"Then some of the Pharisees said, This Man Jesus is not from God, because He does not keep or observe the Sabbath." John 9:16.

For those of us who have grown up in Christianity, we know that one of the ten commandments is to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Only two generations ago it was accepted that on the Sabbath (whether a Sunday or Saturday) no respectable person worked, children could not play outdoors, the only book you were allowed to read was the Bible and everyone must go to church on that day. My great uncle told me that when he was a child they had to stay indoors on Sundays and were only allowed to play with "Biblical" toys like Noah's ark and were allowed to read only the Bible. Not surprisingly, he grew up not wanting anything to do with Christ or Christianity.

Today we may pat ourselves on the back for recognizing our freedom from such legality and strictness. We know that we live under grace and not the law and believe ourselves to be living in real freedom since we may believe we are free to even play (or watch) sports on Sundays, go shopping on Sundays, work on Sundays and, of course, go to church on Sundays. However, in the process of patting ourselves on the back, our burgeoning pride may blind us to the Truth that Jesus so clearly gave to the religious leaders in Matthew 12 when they accused His followers of working on the Sabbath: *"I tell you, Something greater and more exalted and more majestic than the temple is here! And if you had only known what this saying means, 'I desire mercy rather than sacrifice', you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."*

In both the strictest keeping of the law and even in our "freedom" we may still completely miss the meaning and intentions of God and be like the Israelites in the wilderness who knew the acts of God but did not know the ways of God as Moses did.

Observing the Man

The Sabbath, as given in the Law of Moses, is completely fulfilled in Christ Himself. This is why He could boldly claim that He was the master of the Sabbath and that He was far greater than their holy day. As Paul said to the Colossians: "God disarmed the principalities and powers that were ranged against us... Therefore let no one sit in judgment on you in matters of food and drink, or with regard to a feast day or a New Moon or a Sabbath. *Such things are only the shadow of things that are to come*, and they have only a *symbolic value*. But the *reality* of it belongs to Christ." (Col 2:15-17). He IS the Sabbath personified! He IS the evidence of God's Perfect Work and the evidence of God's Rest and Satisfaction on the seventh day - He is THE Sabbath, a Holy Day!

He is Holiness personified and this Holy Man broke the Sabbath here on earth time and time again! It was one of the key reasons why the Jews wanted to kill Him: "*...the Jews began to persecute Jesus and sought to kill Him because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, My Father has worked until now, and I, too, must be at work. This made the Jews more determined than ever to kill Him; because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but He actually was speaking of God as being His own Father, making Himself equal with God.*" (John 5:16-18, see also Matthew 12; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 13:14; John 7:19; 9:16). Why did He break the Sabbath so many times? To reveal that the Greater, the much greater than the temple (religious or church system) had come! He was revealing and exposing the fact that they were holding onto their religion, their temple/church, their tradition, their 'holy day' and the letter of the law rather than accepting the whole Word of God Himself revealed personally among them. He said: "you are nullifying and making void the Word of God through your tradition" (Mark 7:13).

Do we still see this happening today? Absolutely! This one law was a bone of contention for the religious people not only two thousand years ago, but today also. Just as Jesus was accused and persecuted for not doing what they thought He should do on the Sabbath, so also His brothers and sisters today are often accused of the same thing: not going to church or not setting aside Sunday as a holy day! This is because His disciples, both then and now, find their real Life in *Christ* rather than in

traditions or in religion; they see and know that Something far greater than a mere day or a building is here! (Matt 12:6-8).

Observing the Eternal

Regardless of whether some "break the Sabbath" as the disciples of Jesus did or "observe the Sabbath" as the Pharisees did, all of that is merely temporal, outward, external observances and judgments or 'measuring the outer courtyard' of the temple and as such is comparatively unimportant to the eternal, internal Truth of Christ and His Life dwelling in us! (Gal 2:16, 3:2,3) What is vital is the eternal. God is always concerned with the internal - the sanctuary of our heart - for the heart is where worship of either Self or God originates.

The shift from the external, symbolic observances of the law of the Old Testament to the internal experience of the New Testament has to take place within us - God With Us, living, resting in us and us in Him. His Word is written in our hearts as we in turn rest and live in Him in our daily experience. Paul wrote much about this to the Galatians, encouraging them not to be bound by the law again (*Galatians 4:9-11, 5:1,4-6*).

The Old Testament is full of real life pictures and examples which we can learn from. Abraham, Jacob, Saul, David and Moses were all tested on this issue of not going ahead themselves but resting and waiting for GOD. The challenge and test for us is to trust and have confidence in God even when we do not see any evidence suggesting that we should do so; to simply trust and rest in Him and to not move ahead and do things ourselves even when it appears as though God is not doing as He promised or is too slow according to our timetable. *"For he who has once entered God's rest also has ceased from the weariness and pain of human labors, just as God rested from those labors peculiarly His own. Let us therefore be zealous to enter that Rest of God, to know and experience it for ourselves, that no one may fall or perish by the same kind of unbelief and disobedience into which those in the wilderness fell."* Hebrews 4:10,11.

Failing to wait patiently and steadfastly is failing to believe. Failing to believe is failing to trust. Failing to trust God is to have Self on the throne as lord and king and believing in your Self instead of God. Belief is not

something we just acknowledge in our heads, it is something that must be in our hearts. If we simply believe from the head, our own emotions will easily control us and we will be tossed about by the winds of different teachings and the games of men (Eph 4:14). The bottom line is do I REALLY totally believe and trust God from my heart, no matter what? This was the test of the children of Israel in the wilderness, they wanted to enter the Promised Land, their place of rest, but could not do so because of their unbelief. This is exactly the same issue for each of us as His children today for Christ IS our Promised Land and Christ IS our Place and Day of Rest, our Sabbath:

"God's promise of entering his place of rest still stands, so we ought to tremble with fear that some of you might fail to get there. For this Good News - that God has prepared a place of rest - has been announced to us just as it was to them. But it did them no good because they didn't BELIEVE what God told them. For only we who believe can enter his place of rest. As for those who didn't believe, God said, "In my anger I made a vow: They will never enter my place of rest," even though his place of rest has been ready since he made the world. We know it is ready because the Scriptures mention the seventh day, saying, "On the seventh day God rested from all his work." But in the other passage God said, "They will never enter my place of rest." So God's rest is there for people to enter. But those who formerly heard the Good News failed to enter because they disobeyed God. So God set another time for entering his place of rest, and that time is TODAY. God announced this through David a long time later in the words already quoted: "Today you must listen to his voice. Don't harden your hearts against him." This new place of rest was not the land of Canaan, where Joshua led them. If it had been, God would not have spoken later about another day of rest. So there is a special rest still waiting for the people of God. For all who enter into God's rest will find rest from their labors, just as God rested after creating the world." (Hebrews 4:6-10 NLT).

Our Father is grieved when we do not cease from our own work or activity of trying to please Him and simply REST in Him and His accomplished Work in knowing the Word of Christ as our Home or Resting Place. He LONGS for His children to enter into His Rest... the Rest that He has freely provided to all at such cost: His Son Jesus Christ as Lord of the Sabbath.

Observing the Stop Signs

The Hebrew word for Sabbath is "shabbathown" and is usually translated as "cease" or "rest". The root word "shabath" means:

to cease (STOP!), desist, rest; to cause to cease, put an end to; to exterminate, destroy; to remove; to cause to fail.

This is so simple and basic that it is hard for us to accept it: in order to rest in Christ we have to *stop* doing things ourselves. So often what we think God would want us to do (or "What Would Jesus Do") leads us into bondage instead of freedom because it is instigated and implemented by our flesh (through *our* reasoning and what *we* think is best) instead of by the Spirit. Jesus Christ brings us FREEDOM and not bondage. When we work with Him, in Him, and through Him, then there is an abundance of death-defying Life in operation:

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to Me. Get away with Me and you'll recover your Life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with Me and work with Me - watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with Me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." (Matt 12:28-30 The Message).

One of the meanings of 'shabath' is to destroy or to cause to fail. Yes, God certainly does this with us! So often our discouragement and trials are because HE is working to cause all that is of our flesh to fail and be destroyed so that we may enter more fully into Him as our Rest! We do not like to fail or be destroyed and we will readily blame everything and everyone rather than accepting God's verdict upon our flesh and letting it die so that we may enter into His Rest. It is only when we truly Rest In Peace that the Spirit can come forth and be released from our body to live in and from the heavenlies where our true Life is.

Observing the Rest

In order to prevent us from fully apprehending Truth, our enemy will often try to push us to one extreme or the other and so twist things to his advantage. With this issue of rest, when God has opened our eyes to see and know Christ as our Sabbath Rest, the enemy may then try to

discredit God's work by deceiving us into so-called "resting" which means doing nothing (perhaps better described as sleep or spiritual death) and so bring to a halt what God does want us to be doing. The truth is that resting in Christ is a place of real Life, activity and growth; but not as we have ever known it because it is largely unseen by man! If we know that there is no Life and no internal growth in us, then it may be the sleep of death we are in rather than Rest. If that is so, we need Christ to breathe His resurrection Life into us.

The other extreme in reaction to this is to be deceived into fighting God's true rest by viewing it as an attack: 'the enemy is trying to shut me down' and so we encourage ourselves to courageously battle on in the strength of our flesh even while zealously and sincerely believing we are doing the work of God... We fail to recognize that it is the Holy Spirit trying to shut down our flesh and that we are in fact fighting against God.

In any kingdom there can be only one king. In the kingdom of our individual lives, if Christ is not King and governing us, then we are still the lord and king of our own lives and we will be kept busy actively defending and maintaining our position and territory at all costs instead of just resting and letting THE King defend that which is His. Either we know God IS God and we relinquish all control of our lives to Him and rest and grow in the knowledge of Christ, or we retain control of ourselves and live in anxiety and unrest. Resting in Peace is an amazing thing, it is letting go all control to God - allowing Christ to be Lord of ALL - the Lord of our Rest, our Sabbath. It ought to be the most obvious and easy thing to do since He IS God - and yet we find it so hard to do because we have to first give up on ourselves, stop trusting ourselves and really start trusting and believing God! The encouraging thing about knowing Him as our Rest is that we can DO nothing to bring it about except submit to Him and rest; we simply have to know Him, yield and rest in Him and allow Him to do it all!

Observing a Warning

In speaking of His return, Jesus said, "*Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath.*" (Matt 24:20). Obviously He didn't say this so that people wouldn't 'work' or exert themselves on a holy day because He Himself had worked on the Sabbath! Instead, this was just part of the

picture He was seeking to portray of being prepared to receive Him and follow Him no matter what; being ready to leave whatever thing occupies us and being ready to run after Him at any moment.

Winter weather is a time of little growth and difficult outward circumstances which hinders any escape. This may refer to our circumstances, the things around us which say "you cannot and should not"! Of course Jews were not allowed to travel at all on the Sabbath so He says to pray that your escape won't be on a Sabbath or in winter. That's very practical. But rather than thinking literally, let's think spiritually about how this may apply to us today because Jesus was *always* saying spiritual things which people took naturally and literally instead of spiritually and so they often missed what He was really saying!

So, what was it that Jesus was saying they were to run and escape from? From idolatry in the holy place, ie anything and everything which takes the place of Christ in His temple of our lives: *"When you see the appalling sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the Holy Place - let the reader take notice and heed this. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains..."* (Matt 24:16). Judea may represent Judaism - religion. Those who are still bound by their religion and bound by keeping the Sabbath, cannot or will not leave it all and follow ONLY Christ. They want it to be Christ AND... Christ AND their religion. Christ AND the Sabbath. Christ AND my church. Christ AND what I'm comfortable with. *Pray* that we will hear His call to escape all the religious things which bind us, and instead discover the freedom which is in Him! Otherwise we may find that we are so entrenched in our religion that we will not leave it even for Him. The whole passage is a picture of urgency; running away from Judea (Judaism/religion), leaving everything and going up into the mountains. The mountains in the Bible are symbolic of the high places of God and being close to Him - the heavenlies.

One of the Greek words for rest is also translated as Liberty - we are free to rest, He is free to work! This is HIS work, and His choice and His desire for us and we simply must yield to Him: *"For the Lord has chosen Zion, He has desired it for His habitation; This is My Resting Place forever, says the Lord, here will I dwell, for I have desired it. I will surely and abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread. Her priests also will I clothe with salvation, and her saints shall shout aloud*

for joy." The Provision of Christ! (Psalm 132:13-15). He provides all we need - bread, clothing, rest, joy - all is found in Him!

Oh, the wisdom of keeping and observing our Sabbath... of not working or doing our own works, but instead resting and knowing the Liberty and Holiness of Christ and keeping our eyes fixed on Him as our Sabbath... May He exterminate and destroy the restless flesh within each of us and always cause it to fail; for then we will come to truly "observe the Sabbath/Rest" Who is Christ!

When God reveals more of Who He is and who we are and we give up on ourselves and cease from our striving and doing, we can rest and relax into Who He is and He does it all! To be reduced to Christ and only Christ, is to really be enlarged to Everything! He becomes Everything: our Sabbath Rest, our Source of Life, our All. We are often still so alive to our own situations, our flesh and the big M.E. (My Earth) instead of being dead and buried with R.I.P. (Resting In Peace - i.e. Christ) carved into a tombstone above our piece of earth - ME. Yet it is only when we truly do Rest In Peace that the Spirit can come forth and be released from the body to be with Him and live in and from the heavenlies where our true Life is.

"I tell you, Something greater and more exalted and more majestic than the temple is here! And if you had only known what this saying means, 'I desire mercy rather than sacrifice', you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." Matthew 12:6-8.



"Touch Not My Anointed"... but not as we've known it

The phrase "touch not My anointed" has been abused and misused, often by people who do not want to hear anything negative or convicting. However, Father has been showing me a completely different way of looking at this phrase. Many times we touch God's anointed ones (His children) without realising it; through our words. Not only with negative words but even through our compassionate, kind words. I was prompted to read the following story, and then Father showed me the importance of speaking from Christ and His nature within me rather than from my own nature.

And they set the ark of God upon a new cart and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, drove the new cart. And when they came to Nacon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled and shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for touching the ark, and he died there by the ark of God. David was grieved and offended because the Lord had broken forth upon Uzzah, and that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day. 2 Sam 6:3,6-8.

The ark of God was the most sacred piece of furniture in the temple, it was in the Holy of Holies. It was representative of God's presence and power because it contained some manna, the 10 commandments and the rod. This is what I saw - the ark represents not only Christ, but also His power and presence in His dwelling place/temple; which is now each of us as His people (we are the temple of the Holy Spirit). We each contain Him as our manna (spiritual food - Jesus is our Bread), His laws (which are now written on our hearts instead of being external rules to keep) and the rod (discipline & guidance from Him) - ALL of which originate and come from the Holy Spirit and are in the internal holy of holies or spirit of each of our temples/bodies.

In this story the ark (representing the spirit of a child of God which contains the Holy Spirit) came to Nacon's threshing floor which is a place of separation where the chaff is removed from the wheat. Nacon's name means "prepared". This threshing floor, these difficult circumstances, were prepared and ordained by God for separating and winnowing. When it looked like the ark/person got shaken (was being winnowed) and was in danger of falling, Uzzah reached out and STOPPED it! He presumed that he was doing God a favour, that he was doing what God wanted and he was immediately killed for his presumption because he had **interfered** with something holy and something which God had allowed to happen! Uzzah's name means "strength" and he did this in his own strength, with the strength of his flesh, his own arm. It was NOT of God. It was not God's compassion or mercy that he was acting from, but rather his own compassion.

Our "Good" Intentions

It is true that our first reaction is usually of the flesh. Good intentions don't count for a thing; if something originates from our flesh, whether good or bad, then it is unholy and will produce death, not life. "A good intention will not justify a bad action". Perhaps it was Uzzah's long familiarity with the ark, since it had been in his home, that brought about his presumptuous act, but that did not excuse it.

And David was offended. The Hebrew word means to be furious; how could God be so lacking in compassion and mercy? After all, Uzzah was just trying to HELP Him! BUT God does not need or want our help when it comes from our own strength. Even fleshly mercy is an unrighteous and unholy thing because it is from us and from our flesh and not from God and His Life! *It is the Spirit Who gives life; the flesh conveys no benefit whatever. (John 6:63).*

One of the ways in which we learn is by our mistakes. Our natural tendency when we see someone heading for trouble is to try to stop them; or if someone is hurting, to comfort them. Sometimes that is the right thing to do, but sometimes it is the wrong thing to do. Sometimes our Father will want to teach His child something due to the consequences of their actions or words. If we intervene and interfere with that; we are touching something holy, we are touching God's anointed

one.

The reason the ark was shaken in the first place was because it was not being carried in the way that God had specified. David was transporting it on a new cart; but it was meant to be carried on poles on priest's shoulders; not ever on some man-made device! They had made an exception to God's rules regarding carrying the ark. Perhaps they had compassion on the men who had to carry it and thought they had come up with a much better idea... BUT it was NOT God's way! It was the way of their enemies. It had been carried on a new cart by the Philistines, and it had arrived back in Israel on the cart the Philistines had made (*1 Sam 6*). We are not to follow the ways of the world, even ways which appear to be a good idea.

Our "Good" Ideas

The cart was man's way of dealing with things but it was not God's way. At the prepared time and place the oxen stumbled and caused the ark to begin to fall. Perhaps the oxen stumbled over a rock? Jesus is the Rock of Offence and Stumbling Block (*Is 8:14, Rom 9:32, 1 Pet 2:8*). Yet how often do we see a brother or sister stumble over Who He is or what He reveals to them and then we, in our so-called wisdom, try to tell them that it's all okay? God USES offence to offend us in order to reveal to us something about ourselves that we do not want to see, but that we NEED to see; it is in fact His kindness that He will try to show it to us. When you are offended; TAKE NOTE! What is the Spirit showing you about yourself? Don't concern yourself with the person who offended you or become pre-occupied with them, deal with the beam in your own eye. You are responsible and accountable for yourself, not for your brother or sister.

They had just been trying to HELP with the cart idea and Uzzah had just been trying to help stop the ark/person falling, so David got offended and angry at God. God did not appear to recognise how helpful they had all been, after all, didn't He see their hearts and know that they had His best interests at heart? Didn't He understand that they had the best intentions and motives? They didn't want His ark to be damaged! Doesn't He know how much He needs us to help Him and one another?

This offence revealed pride; it was trusting in the flesh and making decisions and judgments based on what was seen in the natural rather than seeing from God's perspective or even asking Him what was to be done. David later said *"Because you bore it not as God directed at first, the Lord our God broke forth upon us - because we DID NOT SEEK HIM in the way HE ordained."* (1 Chron 15:13). His ways are so much higher than our ways and often totally different than what would appear to be the right way. We do not always know why He allows some things to happen but we DO know that we can trust Him regardless. Sometimes it seems we find it easier to trust Him with ourselves than to trust Him with other people, especially people we love. We tend to respond to our needs or other's needs instead of responding because God tells us to, but "the need never constitutes the call".

"It is always a challenge for us to trust Father in both the things we are directed to be involved in and also in areas of which we are aware, yet have received no instructions about. One of the reasons some respond to need rather than to God is that they cannot seem to trust Him to handle a situation without them. Therefore, some sincere and good activity is the result of unbelief; and whatever is not of faith is sin. Think about that!" ¹

Unrighteous, human compassion, love, mercy and kindness breed compromise which brings death. Whatever does not originate from Life, will result in death. Human love is selfish and is the opposite of God's love. It is the fruit of our life, our flesh, rather than the fruit of the Spirit of Life. Unbelievers often exhibit love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness etc, and these fruit LOOK good, but they are from the wrong source if they are from our life instead of God's Life and therefore will not bring Life no matter how good they are.

An example of this in the New Testament is Peter. Jesus had been saying that He must suffer many things and then die and be raised from the dead. *"Then Peter took Him aside to speak to Him privately and began to reprove Him sharply, saying, God forbid, Lord! This must never happen to you! But Jesus turned away and said to him, Get behind Me Satan! You are in My way, an offense and a hindrance to Me; for you are minding what partakes not of the nature and quality of God, but of men."* (Matthew 16:22,23). Peter was so confident of himself and so "wise" that

he reproved the Anointed One of God! We may think that we would never do that; and yet we can be guilty of exactly the same thing with Christ's anointed ones today. Peter was simply being compassionate and caring; he did not want Jesus to suffer and die BUT he was not feeling or speaking from God's heart but rather that "of men". He acted from HIS compassion rather than God's and Christ viewed this as being the enemy himself speaking to Him through Peter! In this instance Peter's compassion was his weakness; not his strength. If we speak out of OUR compassion, we too can be guilty of preventing or hindering God's anointed ones from embracing the Cross. A serious offence indeed.

Jesus knew when to have compassion and when not to. We must not ever give grace or license or compassion to things which He does not. He didn't show much compassion to the Pharisees, or to Martha or even His own parents sometimes! His love was, and still is, TOUGH and will say when something is wrong even if it will hurt. His discernment and wisdom are essential.

Our Foundation

Going back to the picture of the temple, David was told by God to buy the threshing floor and to build an altar there. The temple in Jerusalem was built on the site of this threshing floor. Jerusalem means "foundation of peace". To us now, as the temple of the Holy Spirit, this says that the threshing floor, winnowing, shaking, separating experiences, are vital and foundational. They are the basis upon which our Father builds His temple and enables it to grow and become strong.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit AND with fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand and He will thoroughly clear out and clean His threshing floor and gather and store His wheat in His barn, but the chaff He will burn up with fire that cannot be put out. (Matthew 3:12).

The outer court of the temple is likened to our body, the holy place our soul, and the holy of holies (holiest place) our spirit. In the holy place there was the altar of incense (our prayers), the table of show bread (representing our communion & fellowship) and the lampstand (words of light for us all). Each of these things, while they can be between just God and man, can also be corporate, body functions as opposed to the holiest

place which is only between God and His child. In the holy place the lampstand enables us to see one another and we may be asked to tell a brother or sister what we see about them, but it is in the holiest place, the secret hidden place, that God's words are written on our hearts. It is there that we have communion with Him, it is there that He reveals Himself to us as the Word, Light, Life, Way, Truth; our All. He is the only One that can open our eyes to see and our ears to hear.

That is not to say that we never speak on behalf of God but typically, we tend to speak from ourselves and from our own compassion and mercy rather than God's. It will not bring a harvest of good fruit because the source of the mercy is from our fleshly nature rather than God's holy nature. *What is born of (originates from) the flesh is FLESH; and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. (John 3:6).*

Our Light

We must speak of what we see from the lampstand's light rather than the outer court's natural daylight. The sun is natural light but the lampstand is fueled by oil - the Holy Spirit. We can only truly SEE when we see by His Light - HE is our Light. The holiest place had no source of light, it was a dark place because God is the only Source of Light (*Rev 21:23*). This seems back to front to us, the darkest place has the Light, but this illustrates that we must not act based upon what we see in the natural from the world's sun shining on the outer person, but speak and act only by what is revealed to us by the Lampstand in the holy place and by what we see by the supernatural Light of God in the holiest place.

We need to learn to see things from God's perspective and to speak and act according to His direction rather than our own or because of what we think we should say or do. In the last chapter of John, Jesus prophesied to Peter and told him what would happen in his old age. But Peter, always ready with a question, asked "Lord, what about John?" and Jesus basically told him that was none of his business! It is GOD's business what He does with each of His anointed ones and we must be careful to speak into other's lives only when specifically directed by Him to do so. We tend to compare ourselves with each other and use one another as a measuring stick; but what is important is our Father's expectations; not other people's. *When they measure themselves with themselves and*

compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding and behave unwisely. We, on the other hand, will not boast beyond our proper limit, but will keep within the limits God has allotted us as our measuring line and which reaches and includes even you. (2 Cor. 10:12,13). It is the Father that always knows what is best for the children, not the brother or sister!

We must NEVER EVER interfere with the sacred work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life even though it may be very difficult to stand by and say or do nothing. Other times it can be very difficult to SAY what He says to say and our saying must always be in His timing and in His way. It is a holy thing and we are not the Holy Spirit. We are simply vessels which contain Him and we must learn to speak and act only as He directs and not from our own strength or our own wisdom. Threshing floor experiences are absolutely necessary to separate the wheat from the chaff and it is a holy work. Please carry on separating the holy from the unholy in us Father, purify Your people.

And the Lord Whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple; the Messenger of the covenant Whom you desire, behold He shall come, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap; He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver and He will purify the priests and refine them like gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord offerings in righteousness.

Malachi 3:1-3

The Threshing Floor ²

by Steve Camp

Separate the wheat from the chaff on the threshing floor
And set aside the first fruits for Your pleasure
From the valley of decision, light the way to heaven's door
And bring me to the storehouse as Your treasure
*When the Master comes with His winnowing fan
To finish the work of refining
Shaping the heart of a righteous man
He's got to beat it out on the threshing floor.*

I said, Separate the truth, from the lie, on this temple site
And bring my risky secrets into the open
The vats are overflowing and the harvest is ripe
But the husk around my heart remains unbroken
*When the Master comes with His winnowing fan
To finish the work of refining
Shapin' the heart of a righteous man*
He will beat it out on the threshing floor.

*The wheels of His sled are sharp and clean
I feel the weight of His stone as its breakin' me
He's shakin' me down to a handful of grain
And I know by His Spirit that my loss is my gain
When the Master comes with His winnowing fan
To finish the work of refining*
I said He's shaping the heart of a righteous man
He's gonna beat it out on the threshing floor.

1 Page 125 "Revelatory Adventure" by John Beaumont.
2 Copyright Steve Camp, lyrics used with permission.



Baptism... but not as we've known it

Jesus said to them, "You will drink from the cup that I'm going to drink and be baptized with the baptism with which I'm going to be baptized" (Mark 10:39).

Shortly after I put my testimony on Unveiling in February 2012, my parents visited us and my mother asked me, "Why did you not say anything about your baptism in your testimony?"

I replied, "Because it was just another religious thing I did that I knew I was meant to do."

She said, "But we didn't tell you to do it, you wanted to be baptized..." and I agreed, saying, "Yes, because I knew very well what was expected of me as a good Christian, and I knew what you guys wanted me to do!"

When I was baptized as a teenager I certainly had all the head knowledge of what I was doing and why, and I was sure that God wanted me to be baptized, but the simple truth is that *the act of baptism could not take me from death to Life!* No ritual can bring about a spiritual result because a ritual is something WE do as opposed to something the Spirit of God does.

Then my mother said, "Didn't Jesus say to baptize people in His name?"

Well, it is very debatable whether Jesus ever said that! "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" (Matt. 28:19) is one of the most contested verses in the Bible. The second half of the sentence is believed to have been *added much later*. Some refuse to accept this because it is included in the Textus Receptus and baptism plays such a large role in church tradition. However, Matthew's gospel was originally written in Hebrew and was translated into Greek much later. The Jews

preserved several Hebrew versions (*see links at the end*) but these Hebrew texts were not used in the creation of the English Bible. Instead the Latin and Greek translations were used.

In one of these Hebrew versions this verse reads: "You go and teach them to carry out all the things that I have commanded you forever." Some believe that the phrase about baptism was added by the "church fathers" into the Greek and Latin versions. "Conybeare is believed to have been the first to write against it, following the discovery of a variant reading of the verse, within the writings of Eusebius of Caesarea. Some 17 times in his works prior to Nicea, Eusebius quotes Matthew 28:19 as "Go and make disciples of all nations in my name" without mentioning the Trinity baptism command." (Analysis of Matthew 28:19 R. D. Hughes).

But what does baptism mean anyway? Perhaps NOT what the church has interpreted it to mean...

History of Baptism

Baptism, whether by immersion or sprinkling, is a very old religious ritual of many religions. It has never been an exclusively Christian ritual. Hindus have been practicing baptism for 4000 years. As part of their religious purification rites they are immersed in a river or sprinkled with water. Babylonian, Egyptian and Roman religions also practiced ritual purification ceremonies as is proved by both archeology and ancient literature. Apuleius, a Roman writer who lived in the 2nd century, wrote of: "the ancient Roman initiation that was preceded by a normal bath and then a ceremonial sprinkling by the priest of Isis." He said that the ritual of sprinkling and cleansing with water in ancient times was: "a kind of voluntary death and salvation through divine grace." (Apuleius 120-180 AD, *Metamorphosis*, Book 11, 21).

More importantly, Judaism had a number of cleansing and purification rites including baptism (called *tevilah* in Hebrew). Water played an important role in their ceremonies and regulations, including immersion in water and sprinkling with water (Ex. 29:4; Lev. 15:13; 16:24; 17:15,16; Num. 8:7; 19:7,8; Deut. 23:11). John's baptism was nothing new to the Pharisees or to the Jews. They were very familiar with what we call "baptism". In their religion full body immersion (*tevilah*) had to be done in

the running water of a river (called "living water") or in a mikveh (baptismal pool of rain water in the temple). It was not a bath for washing in, it was seen as a symbolic immersion for spiritual cleansing, conversion and renewal. All Gentiles who wanted to become Jews had to go through tevilah/baptism. To this day converts to Judaism are still required to be baptized in a "mikveh".



Ancient mikveh ruins (left) mikveh in the Jerusalem temple (centre) and a modern Jewish mikveh (right).

By the 2nd century the "church fathers" believed and taught that you were not saved unless you were baptized with water:

"The prescript is laid down that '*without baptism, salvation is attainable by none*' chiefly on the ground of that declaration of the Lord, who says, 'Unless one be born of water, he hath not life.'" (Tertullian 140-230AD, On Baptism, Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 3, pg. 674-675).

In other words, *the church was necessary for salvation!* Baptism was put in the place of Christ, because salvation was viewed as being brought about *by water baptism* (a work of man) rather than only by faith and trust in Jesus and what He has done. They simply replaced the rituals and

laws of the Old Testament with a set of their own:

"But when the time began to draw near... that the Prophet should appear, of whom he had foretold that He should warn them by the mercy of God to cease from sacrificing; *lest haply they might suppose that on the cessation of sacrifice there was no remission of sins for them He instituted baptism by water* amongst them, *in which they might be absolved from all their sins* on the invocation of His name." (Clement, "Recognitions of Clement," Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 8, pg. 88, emphasis mine).

Due to this belief that being baptized was necessary for salvation, it was a logical conclusion that the earlier you were baptized, and therefore saved, the better - and so infant baptism was introduced. Infant baptism (christening) had been a practice of pagan religions for a long time before it was practiced in the church; sprinkling the baby in pagan religions was supposed to cleanse it from being born in sin and free it from the devil. Some claimed that:

"The Church *received from the apostles the tradition of giving baptism even to infants*. For the apostles, to whom were committed the secrets of divine mysteries, knew that there is in everyone the innate stains of sin, which are washed away through water and the Spirit" (Origen 248AD, Commentaries on Romans 5:9).

But there is no mention whatsoever of infant baptism in the Scriptures. So where did these erroneous ideas come from? They were importing and mixing other religion's beliefs and practices with their new religion of Christianity. Many things that are considered "important" in churches today were simply "imported" from pagan religions. Many churches today still teach that your sins are not forgiven unless you are baptized in water. They appear to have more faith in this religious ritual done by man, than in what God has done through Christ!

The Nicene Council in 325AD (attended by many religious leaders) was an attempt at creating a universal religion/church to help strengthen the Roman empire. Christ's followers who did not accept the integration of pagan practices into Rome's Christianity, including infant baptism, were persecuted and often killed. "Christening" was believed to make one a

"Christian" and in the year 416 infant baptism became a compulsory law for the entire Roman Empire. Those who did not agree with these baptisms, could not call themselves Christians because they had not been christened into Christendom. They were often killed by the church for not conforming.

The history of the church is not good... And lest we proudly think that this applies only to the Roman Catholic Church, remember that Protestant evangelical churches are not much different. They have been born from Catholicism and most of the same traditions are still present in some form today. This issue of baptism is a case in point.

What Does "Baptize" Mean?

The word "baptize" was *not a religious word* in the Greek; it simply meant to immerse, submerge, wash or overwhelm. "Baptize" is one of few words in the Bible that *wasn't translated into English from the Greek*, it was imported directly from the Greek as a transliteration instead of a translation. So instead of saying "immerse", "dip", or "wash" the Greek word "*baptize*" was kept; presumably because the ritual and practice of baptism was already well established as part of church doctrine and religious culture. The Greek word *baptizo* means:

- 1) to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge (of vessels sunk)
- 2) to cleanse by dipping or submerging, to wash, to make clean with water, to wash one's self, bathe
- 3) to overwhelm

In a Greek recipe for pickles, the food was to be baptizo (submerged) in vinegar. Telling your child to go and be baptized meant for them to go and have a wash! There are a few instances where "baptize" was translated into English in the Bible, "But the Pharisee, noticing that Jesus did not first *wash* before the meal, was surprised" (Luke 11:38). That word for "wash" is *baptizo* and yet has been translated as *wash* instead of *baptize*. Why? To distinguish baptism as a religious tradition of the church, even though these baptisms mentioned here were also religious traditions: "When they (the Jews) come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they *wash* (baptizo). And they observe many other traditions, such as the *washing* (baptismos) of cups, pitchers and kettles... For

laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men, such as the *washing* (baptism) of pots and cups: and many other such things you do." (Mark 7:4,8).

"Baptize" was a common Greek word used every day and did not exclusively mean a religious sacrament or rite like it does now.

When we use the word "baptize" we think at once and we think only of the religious rite. *Apart from that rite the word has no meaning for us.* It is simply and solely a religious technical term. (F. H. Chase, The Journal of Theological Studies, July, 1905, p. 503)

Three translations of the Bible do sometimes translate "baptize" into English: "The Complete Jewish Bible", "The Aramaic Bible in Plain English", and the "International Standard Version". Mark 1:8 in The Aramaic Bible reads: "I have immersed you in water, but He will immerse you in The Spirit of Holiness." John was pointing *away* from the literal immersing and washing that he was doing in water, to the *spiritual* immersion and washing that only the Holy Spirit can do!

A lot of clarity can come when you simply translate the Greek word into its English meaning:

He who believes and is *washed* will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. (Mark 16:16)

John *immersed* in water, but you shall be *immersed* in The Spirit of Holiness. (Acts 1:5)

Repent and be *washed* every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)

We were therefore buried with Him through *immersion* into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Rom. 6:4)

All of you who were *immersed* into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (Gal. 3:27).

Being immersed into Christ, being submerged in Him, is powerful language! To be immersed in Him is to be thoroughly absorbed with Him and covered by Him. We naturally think of water when we think of

baptism, but who in the Bible claimed to be Living Water? Christ Himself. This is about being *washed by Christ and immersed into Him as the Living Water* and not about physical water at all. We tend to take things so literally... we are "saved by water", but *not by physical water here on earth*, but by the heavenly Living Water who is Christ! How silly of us to think that we might be saved through being immersed or sprinkled with water here on earth; that would mean that we were saved by something *man* did here and not by God at all! Jesus in His talk with Nicodemus said, "unless one is *born of water and spirit*, he can't enter into the Kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Just as He didn't mean being born again physically or literally, neither was the water physical and literal. Jesus was forever pointing away from the natural, to the *spiritual*; for those who had eyes to see...

Towards the end of his life Peter clearly saw this and wrote: "...in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an anti-type (analogy) which now saves us - baptism, not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:20,21). Peter was really clear that he was NOT referring to literal water or a literal immersion that washes and saves us because he immediately qualified his statement with: "*NOT the removal of the dirt of the body*" he was not speaking literally about an external immersion of the body for cleansing in water, but *spiritually* about an internal one: "BUT an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ".

Right throughout the Bible rivers and water are symbolic of the Holy Spirit (Ps. 46:4; 105:41; Eze. 47; John 7:38,39; Rev. 22:1) so being immersed in a river was a picture of being immersed in the Spirit. This should have been really clear to the Jews, they were very familiar with the symbolism of *tevilah*/immersion and the fact that it was done in what they called living (running) water. Jesus said He is the Living Water and we are now immersed in Him by His Spirit! John the Immerser himself declared this link, stating that although he was physically immersing people in water, Jesus would spiritually immerse people in His Spirit (Mark 1:8), Jesus also declared this in Acts 2:38. For us today, it simply makes sense that if you are immersed and submerged in Christ, you are also immersed in His Spirit; *they are One* and cannot be separated!

"There is one Body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one Hope of your calling; one Lord, one Faith, one Immersion; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Eph. 4:4-6). Since this "one Body" is clearly Christ, does it not follow that the rest of this list is applicable to Him also? Our Hope is in Him, our Lord is Him, our Faith is in Him, and our Immersion is in Him! "We were all washed/immersed by one Spirit into one Body - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." (1 Cor. 12:13). Neither the water used to cleanse, nor the water of the Spirit we drink, are *literal*. They are *spiritual*. Why would anyone return to all the literal, physical requirements of the Law of Moses and ignore what Christ has accomplished? The Law was given *until John* (Luke 16:16)!

Jesus said, "You have neither desired, nor have You taken delight in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings - all of which are offered according to the Law - He then went on to say, Behold, here I am, coming to do Your will. Thus He does away with and annuls the first (former) order as a means of expiating sin so that He might inaugurate and establish the second (latter) order. And in accordance with this will of God, we have *been made holy (consecrated and sanctified)* through the offering made once for all of the body of Jesus Christ" (Heb. 10:8-10 Amp). The Greek word for "being made holy" in this verse, also means to be purified and cleansed - His offering is more than sufficient, there are no more rules, laws, baptisms or cleansing ceremonies required. *He is All!*

Ceremonial Cleansing

Some may object at this point because clearly there were physical, literal immersions and ceremonial cleansings performed by John the Baptizer, and also by the followers of Jesus (Acts 8:36; 10:47); and although Jesus Himself didn't baptize anybody (John 4:2), He did go through this ritual Himself.

The Israelites had quite a few ceremonial cleansings, including priests being immersed before they could enter the temple and converts who had to be immersed to signify leaving their old religion for the new. Some of the immersions mentioned in the book of the Acts were clearly an act

performed with water here on this earth. I believe the reason for this is that the first believers were *still doing what they had grown up with in their religion*: immersion in water. *They still had faith in the external material things they they could see, feel and touch*. They were still bound by their religious traditions of ceremonial washing, keeping the feasts, going to the temple etc, hence the need for Paul to write what he did to the Galatians, and to correct Peter, saying, "If we receive God's approval by obeying these laws, then Christ's death was pointless" (Gal. 2:21). They found it hard to let go of the physical external rituals and customs that had been such a vital part of their religion and their life. And people today still find it hard to let them go.

Anybody converting to Judaism had to (and still does) receive circumcision *and baptism*. Paul linked spiritual circumcision with baptism in Col. 2:11,12 because it was common knowledge that any Gentile who wanted to become a Jew had to be both circumcised *and* baptized. Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians because they were reverting to putting their trust in ceremonial acts (like circumcision) instead of trusting in Christ alone. Peter was confronted by Paul over this very thing (Gal. 2:11-21). For many Christians today, although circumcision may be viewed as not essential, baptism still is; many believe that you cannot be a child of God unless you have been baptized. Replacing "circumcision" with "baptism" gives an interesting (and yet I believe, valid) discourse from Paul on such a belief:

"So now that you know God (or should I say, now that God knows you), why do you want to go back again and become slaves once more to the weak and useless spiritual principles of this world? You are trying to earn favor with God by observing certain days or months or seasons or years. I fear for you. Perhaps all my hard work with you was for nothing. I plead with you to *live as I do in freedom from these things, for I have become like you Gentiles — free from those laws...* So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law. Listen! I, Paul, tell you this: *If you are counting on **baptism** to make you right with God, then Christ will be of no benefit to you.* I'll say it again. If you are trying to find favor with God by being **baptized**, you must obey every regulation in the whole law of Moses. For *if you are trying to make yourselves right with God by keeping the law, you have*

been cut off from Christ! You have fallen away from God's grace. But we who live by the Spirit eagerly wait to receive by faith the righteousness God has promised to us. For *when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, there is no benefit in being **baptized** or not being **baptized**.* What is important is faith expressing itself in love...

"Those who are trying to force you to be **baptized** want to look good to others. They don't want to be persecuted for teaching that the cross of Christ alone can save. And *even those who advocate **baptism** don't keep the whole law themselves. They only want you to be **baptized** so they can boast about it and claim you as their disciples.* As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified, and the world's interest in me has also died. *It doesn't matter whether we have been **baptized** or not. What counts is whether we have been transformed into a new creation.* May God's peace and mercy be upon all who live by this principle; they are the new people of God." (Gal. 4:9-12; 5:1-6; 6:12-15, words in bold have been changed).

Everything about the New Way of Life in Jesus is NEW: it is a complete and utter conversion from the symbolic external examples (Old Covenant: physical circumcision) to the true internal realities (New Covenant: spiritual circumcision). It is not a reversion, so to revert back to something symbolic, external, religious and ritualistic like a ceremony of water baptism that you *must* do, just does not fit with what Jesus and His followers preached. Paul said, "*Christ did not send me to baptize* but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power." (1 Cor. 1:17). Paul could not have said that if baptism was an important ritual vital to salvation or if it had been a command of Jesus to immerse in water (going back to where we began with the debatable Matt. 28:19).

The first followers of Christ slowly learned to die to and let go of their Judaism. You see a steady progression of them giving up more and more of these religious acts and traditions as they learned to live under the New Deal that Christ had brought about. In the book of the Acts we can see that they were still learning to let go of their religious ways, then in the letter to the Hebrews you find that everything is now referring to the

purely spiritual (Heb. 6:1,2; 8:13; 9:1,7-9,11-12,24) no more is it a physical temple they go to, but a spiritual Building they are part of. The revelation of Christ as All was not an instant thing, but a progression for the followers of Christ, so this issue with baptism was just part of their journey out of religion and into Christ.

Remember that these cleansings even extended to the utensils that they used: "they observe many other traditions, such as the *washing* (baptismos) of cups, pitchers and kettles..." (Mark 7:4). Jesus referred to this washing of cups in particular: "How terrible it will be for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! *You clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but on the inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.* You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that its outside may also be clean." (Matt. 23:25,26). What requires the most cleaning in a cup? The inside. Yet these traditional immersions of theirs were only cleaning the *outside* and not the inside. Just clean the inside (be immersed and washed spiritually) and the outside will be acceptable. According to Luke, Jesus said these words in direct reference to a Pharisee who criticised Him for not having baptized (thus breaking one of the laws of Moses) before eating (Luke 11:38-40).

Paul referred to the exodus from Egypt into the Promised Land as an immersion also: "I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that all our ancestors who left Egypt were under the cloud, and they all went through the sea. They were all united with Moses by baptism in the cloud and in the sea." (1 Cor. 10:1,2). Even that wasn't a literal baptism, because they weren't immersed in either the cloud or the sea. They passed through on *dry ground*; it was *symbolic* of an immersion of death to Life in transferring from a land of death into a Promised Land of Life: Christ Himself.

Jesus referred to the spiritual immersion in His Spirit (Acts 2:38) and also spoke not of a literal immersion in water, but of an immersion into *death* (Matt. 20:22,23; Mark 10:38,39; Luke 12:50) "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?" (Rom. 6:3). Since we died with Him and were raised with Him, we were also immersed with and into Him; we ARE His Body.

The Baptism of Jesus

Then we have to ask: so *why* did John baptize, and *why* did Jesus ask John to baptize Him? John was the one who prepared the way for Jesus Christ, so all that he did was pointing to Him: to Christ as the Immerser and Christ as the Living Water. Baptism/immersion into the name of Jesus and the baptism of John were two different things, linked only by the symbolic (John) preceding the actual (Jesus), as is mentioned in the book of the Acts and as John himself said: "I baptize *with water* BUT He will baptize *with the Holy Spirit*".

John's baptism was different to other immersions of the day because John's immersion was not a prescribed immersion for ceremonial cleansing but was one of repentance. "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance" (Acts 19:4, also: Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 13:24), and yet Jesus insisted on being baptized by John. So *why* did Jesus need this symbolic baptism of repentance - an immersion signifying a change of mind? Why would this holy Man, who had not sinned, be required by God to be ceremonially washed for repentance? What did Jesus have to repent of (meaning to have a change of mind) that would make this act necessary from God's perspective? It could well be that Jesus was repenting and turning away from one thing that He had done perfectly up until this point: *keeping the Jewish Law!* He had been subject to the laws of the Torah and this "baptism of repentance" revealed His *death* to all of that, and His rising to a new covenant, a new Way, a new Life in and of the Spirit for Him, and later (through the Cross) for every one of us.

His baptism revealed an inward death to the old covenant and an inward rising to new Life. "Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to prevent him. "I need you to baptize me", he said. "Surely you do not come to me?" But Jesus replied, "*It is right for us to meet all the Law's demands—let it be so now.*" Then John agreed to his baptism. Jesus came straight out of the water afterwards, and suddenly the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and resting upon him. And a voice came out of Heaven saying, "This is my dearly-loved son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:13-16 Phillips).

For Christ it was about *dying to the religious keeping of the LAW* and

then living from then on *in the Life of the Spirit*. This explains why He was so adamant about needing John to immerse Him, and why it was outside of the temple's mikveh, in living (running) water that He was immersed. It wasn't a purification ceremony in obedience to God (He was already pure), but about *repenting*: it was an immersion of repentance from having kept the religious Law even though He had kept that Law perfectly. It was a sign before God of Him finally *completing and fulfilling the Law* and dying to that Law and Covenant/Contract and being raised into the new Law of Life and liberty in the Spirit with the new contract - resulting in an opened heaven.

When Jesus emerged from the water, God immediately declared Him to be His Son. Of course He was already God's Son prior to this so this declaration may have been indicating that Jesus had now left the "kindergarten" of the Law and graduated to maturity (Gal. 3:23,24), being now a full grown Son, "fulfilling all righteousness" which was the reason Jesus had given for Himself needing to be baptized (Matt. 3:15). In other words: *He was completing and perfecting all that was required*. Twice this word for "fulfilling" is translated as "end"; in Greek it means:

- 1) to make full, to fill up, i.e. to fill to the full
- 2) to render full, i.e. to *complete*
 - a) to fill to the top: so that nothing shall be wanting to full measure, fill to the brim
 - b) to consummate: a number
 - 1) to make complete in every particular, *to render perfect*
 - 2) *to carry through to the end*, to accomplish, carry out, (some undertaking)
 - c) to carry into effect, bring to realisation, realise

So that all fits with the baptism of Jesus being a sign of completing and ending the old covenant: a once for all act symbolic of His death and resurrection on our behalf. The letter to the Galatians is enlightening to read in light of this: "Until the time when we were mature enough to respond freely in faith to the living God, we were carefully surrounded and protected by the Mosaic law. The law was like those Greek tutors, with which you are familiar, who escort children to school and protect them from danger or distraction, making sure the children will really get to the place they set out for. But now you have arrived at your destination:

By faith in Christ you are in direct relationship with God. Your baptism in Christ was not just washing you up for a fresh start. It also involved dressing you in an adult faith wardrobe - Christ's life, the fulfillment of God's original promise." (Gal. 3:23-27 TM).

From this point on Jesus was a marked man. No longer was He governed by the Law and religious expectations, He was now governed solely by the Spirit of God and often did the opposite of what people expected. He set the cat among the pigeons and turned over the tables in the temple in more ways than one: He didn't keep the Sabbath or many of the other laws, and this upset the Jewish religious leaders, resulting in His crucifixion because of His breaking of the Law (John 5:16-18; 7:19; 9:16; Matthew 12; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 13:14). Today, 2000 years later, we are *still* learning to leave Judaism's laws and give up our religious ways to follow Him outside the camp.

How sad it is that people have argued and even died over the issue of baptism by immersion or sprinkling for centuries, and yet have entirely missed the point. The enemy loves to deceive and bring death with these things: "Should we worship here or there, with this or that?" and Jesus says, "NOT in Jerusalem, NOR there, NOT this or that, BUT Me..." (John 4:20-24). Oh for eyes to be opened to see only Him... The church and religion have taken His place for far too long. Are you baptized/immersed in church life, in work for God and in your "ministry", or are you immersed in Christ? Are you immersed in the world around you: television, entertainment, social media, your friends and your work, or are you fully immersed in Christ in the heavenlies?

Traditionally the church teaches that Jesus was immersed as an example, so that we would all follow His example and be baptized by the church, symbolising being buried with Him in death, and rising to new Life. Yes, Jesus Christ certainly was setting an example for us to follow, *but not as we've known it: His example was for us all to die to our own "goodness" and leave behind the works of religion (including baptisms) and the keeping of laws and regulations and instead live in the freedom of the new Law of the Spirit of Life*, just as He did; to have access to an opened heaven just as He did, to listen to and do only what His Father wanted just as He did, and to have the Holy Spirit of God both in and upon us, just as He did!

Let us go forward, then, to mature teaching and leave behind us the first lessons of the Christian message. We should not lay again the foundation of turning away from useless works and believing in God; of the teaching about baptisms and the laying on of hands; of the resurrection of the dead and the eternal judgment. (Hebrews 6:1,2 GNT).

An English translation of one of the Hebrew versions of Matthew can be ordered from BookDepository.com and reviews can be read on Amazon.com. This link contains a compiled list of comments from commentaries, encyclopedias etc on Matt. 28:19:

<http://www.onenesspentecostal.com/matt2819-willis.htm>



Communion... but not as we've known it

"Jesus said to them, I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, you cannot have any life in you unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood. He who feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood has (possesses now) eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true and genuine food and My blood is true and genuine drink. He who feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood dwells continually in Me and I in him." (John 6:53-56).

God often uses graphic language to convey Truth. This example was very offensive to the Jews who were not allowed to eat pork let alone a human's flesh! To think of eating a man's flesh is bad enough, but to drink his blood is even worse, it is a very offensive thing. The thought is awful - to think of tasting the blood let alone drinking and swallowing it... we are naturally repelled! Of course we know that this is the basis of the religious ceremony of "communion" and that Jesus was referring to Himself as being the Bread, *"Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."* (John 6:48-51 NIV) but seriously, eating a representative piece of bread and a cup of red juice in a religious ceremony does not mean for one moment that you are eating the spiritual Bread of Life! Nor does it convey to us the offence of eating human flesh and drinking human blood from a Life that has died for us.

We have to eat and drink every day. We daily need to be in communion with Christ, eating and drinking His flesh and blood. The Body cannot survive without food and drink; but eating and drinking is something personal, something which nobody else can do for us... Centuries of religion have robbed the Cross of its offence and power. The Cross of Calvary was not something sacred or ornate or religious; it was a symbol

of agony, torment, torture, humiliation, embarrassment, unbelievable pain and finally death. Centuries of religion have also robbed our communion with Christ of its offence and power.

Death on a cross and eating human flesh and blood were extremely offensive to the Jews, Jesus was a Stumbling Block as Isaiah said He would be. Of course I'm not suggesting anyone try to crucify themselves or become cannibals! External things have no ability to subdue or deal death blows to Self. We can only grasp the reality, truth and appropriation of these things by the Holy Spirit opening the eyes of our hearts to see and receive them internally instead of externally, enabling them to become reality instead of religion and real in our experience instead of mere knowledge.

The first followers of Christ ate bread and drank wine, they remembered Christ's death and resurrection, and they shared food in one another's homes. They also expected to suffer. Paul went so far as to say that *all* who delight in Christ will meet with persecution (2 Tim 3:12). They knew the reality of suffering as a result of being Christ's ones. *"Even now I rejoice in the midst of my sufferings on your behalf. And in my own person I am making up whatever is still lacking and remains to be completed of Christ's afflictions, for the sake of His body, which is the ekklesia."* (Col 1:24).

Jesus used the illustration of drinking His blood to show us how difficult and awful it is for us to drink His Cup. The disciples said "This is a hard and difficult saying, an offensive and unbearable message. Who can stand to hear it?" (John 6:60). Many were offended and deserted Him because of what He said about drinking His blood and eating His flesh; and many will still react in the same way to drinking His cup with Him. Jesus spoke several times about drinking the cup His Father had given Him, and He was referring to His suffering and death.

To drink of His cup is to share in His suffering and grief. Paul said "the cup of blessing upon which we ask blessing, does it not mean we participate in and share a fellowship (communion) in the blood of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16). The Greek word for fellowship and partnership is *koinonia* and in this verse it is usually translated as "communion". It means a common union, a partnership, a joint participation in the blood of Christ.

When you are united and in partnership or koinonia with Christ in His suffering, it is something you participate in - not just something you know about in your head but something you feel and experience in your heart. The Biblical context of communion was that of eating a meal. Eating together in the Hebrew culture was viewed as something intimate and almost sacred, but this communion with Christ is not about an external ritual performed occasionally with symbolic emblems in a church, it is about an *internal reality* that is your very Life.

We are called to drink the cup of His blood but there is a very dear price to be paid - embracing the Cross and laying down our lives, loves, wants, hopes and desires. *"For even to this were you called. For Christ also suffered for you, leaving you His personal example, so that you should follow in His footsteps. Beloved, do not be amazed and bewildered at the fiery ordeal which is taking place to test your quality, as though something strange and alien to you and your position were befalling you. But insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, rejoice, so that when His glory is revealed, you may also rejoice with triumph" (1 Peter 2:21 4:12,13).*

In the western world today we don't usually have to suffer physically for our beliefs. Our suffering is more likely to be internal; hidden and unseen in the heart and mind, but still very real nonetheless. Rejection, slander, accusation, betrayal and misunderstanding are just a few things we may suffer.

And there is also a very real grief associated with God revealing His heart to us and seeing what He sees. He grieves over many things which 'ought not to be so' and to share a small portion of that suffering and grief with Him is a privilege indeed: "For you have been granted the privilege for Christ's sake not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer in His behalf." (*Philippians 1:29*).

In explaining to His disciples what He must go through in dying on the cross, Jesus gave us a powerful picture: *"I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just one grain; it never becomes more but lives by itself alone. But if it dies, it produces many others and yields a rich harvest. Anyone who loves his life loses it, but anyone who hates his life in this world will keep*

it to life eternal." (John 12:24). The picture of the grain of wheat is rich in meaning. Initially the grain is together with many other grains in the ear of wheat on the plant. Its life source is from the plant which it shares with many others. Then comes the day of separation and harvest when it is either taken to the threshing floor to have the chaff removed so it can be ground into flour, or it is set aside and reserved for the planting season.

When the time is right the grain is placed into the earth. It is on its own and covered with dirt. While the life is inherent in the grain of wheat, it cannot and will not come forth until the conditions which surround it are right. It must be planted on its own and hidden. It now no longer sees the sun or feels the rain or has the companionship it had known in the ear of wheat with other grains, but is in a dark, hidden place, all alone. In that dark place of isolation transformation takes place.

In the earth, the hard outer shell of the wheat is softened by the moisture in the soil and the grain as we have known it, disintegrates and disappears as it is transformed into new life (2 Cor 5:17). The new life makes its way upward towards the sun, and downward towards more moisture. Previously it had survived by relying on the plant which had roots; now it has roots of its own which are firmly and deeply planted (Col 2:7). It had previously been only one grain of wheat, but now because of its "death" in the earth, it bears and brings forth much life by bringing forth MANY grains of wheat which will need to go through this process for themselves so that the Sower receives a great harvest.

One grain of wheat on its own will produce only a tiny, miniscule amount of flour for food.

One grain of wheat which has been planted and has given up its life to be changed and transformed will be fruitful and bear many grains of wheat which will produce a lot of flour and bread for generations after it!

Drinking Christ's blood is about accepting the death of ME (My Earth), it is taking up my Cross daily. It is accepting and doing what God wanted instead of what I want; it is accepting and drinking from the cup my Father gives me. Our flesh never likes suffering or giving up on ourselves. We don't WANT to do it, we don't WANT to suffer or die, it is a very hard thing for us to agree to. If we react or are offended, it just

proves that Self and our flesh are still very much alive, because what is already dead cannot be offended or react. Jesus said: *"If any person wills to come after Me, let him deny himself, forget, lose sight of himself and his own interests, refuse and give up himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me."* (Luke 9:23).

In the same way that Christ is our Passover Lamb and we eat His flesh as our Meat and Bread, so His Blood must also be brought to our lips which are like the doors of the houses at the first passover and must be marked with His blood. Death, sacrifice and blood are practically synonymous in Hebrew writing. We are called to be living sacrifices, totally surrendered and submitted to our God. When our mouths and words are marked by the blood of the Lamb, when we are dead to the things which WE want to say and instead speak His words, it is a sign that we are taking up our Cross daily.

In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus asked Father three times to remove the cup that was before Him. That word "Gethsemane" means "oil press". In our personal Gethsemanes, our suffering is like an oil press which we submit to and drink. It is in accepting and drinking that cup, that we find Life. We must surrender completely to what our Father wants, just as Jesus did, so that His Life will come forth.

Gethsemane is a very lonely place. Jesus asked His friends simply to be there and to wait for Him in the garden while He suffered, but they fell asleep and He was on His own. *"He began to show grief and distress of mind and was deeply depressed. Then He said to them, My soul is very sad and deeply grieved, so that I am almost dying of sorrow. Stay here and keep awake and keep watch with Me. And going a little farther, He threw Himself upon the ground on His face and prayed saying, My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, not what I desire but as You will and desire. And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and He said to Peter, What! Are you so utterly unable to stay awake and keep watch with Me for one hour? All of you must keep awake, be cautious and active and watch and pray, that you may not come into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak."* (Matthew 26:37-41).

He is still looking for those who will stay awake and watch with Him... to

simply be with Him; communing and identifying with His heart. He is still looking for those who will agree to drink the cup of His blood and suffering with Him. It is a "hard and difficult saying", the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak... Mark records Christ's words in the garden as being "Father, everything is possible for You. Take away this cup from Me; yet not what I want but what You want." Christ knew that anything was possible for God and yet going through the suffering and agony of the Cross was still what God wanted; it was not what Jesus wanted, but what His Father wanted. His desire to do what His Father wanted done on earth was stronger than His own human desires.

To die to the things we want or desire is a very difficult thing. Even God-given desires and hopes must be kept yielded to Him because we can be tempted to lay our hands upon them and "help God" by making things happen ourselves. This is not about being dead to sin or being cleansed by the blood (*which are essential*) but about being willing to drink from the cup of death and die to OURSELVES! It is the laying aside of even the good parts of our nature so that ALL will be in complete submission to Him and His will. *"It is harder to die to our virtues than to our vices; but the one is just as necessary as the other for perfect union. Our attachments are the stronger as they are more spiritual"* - Pere La Combe. Often we think we have laid it all down and surrendered all only to discover that we yet hold onto something, even 'godly' things like serving, ministering, helping others and doing things for God but from which WE may secretly delight in by taking to ourselves glory and honour. He must be the sole Reason, Source and Instigator of ALL our doing and saying.

There can be no resurrection Life without death. Only in dying to ourselves and our desires and hopes, can Christ transform us through resurrection Life (2 Cor 4:8-12). Jesus prayed, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven". We cannot embrace our Father's plans for us until we have given up all our own plans. His kingdom cannot come in our lives while we are still on the throne deciding what we will do and say. When we are truly searching for Him and His Kingdom above all else, then our decisions and actions will be based on what HE desires, and He will get all the credit, glory and honour that is rightfully His and His alone.

For my determined purpose is that I may know Him, that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, and that I may in that same way come to know the power outflowing from His resurrection, and that I may so share His sufferings as to be continually transformed to His death, that if possible I may attain to the resurrection that lifts me out from among the dead even while in the body. *Philippians 3:10,11*



Healing... but not as we've known it

"As He passed along, He noticed a man blind from his birth. His disciples asked Him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind? Jesus answered, It was not that this man or his parents sinned, but he was born blind in order that the workings of God should be manifested (displayed and illustrated) in him. We must work the works of Him Who sent Me and be busy with His business while it is daylight; night is coming on, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the world's Light." (John 9:1-5)

God's work often begins in darkness, in blindness. In Jewish culture the beginning of a new day starts at nightfall, so the Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday and the darkness is what signifies the beginning of the new day. In our western culture we think of the new day being when the sun is rising, but really each new day begins with night; true sight begins with blindness; true hearing begins with being deaf; true speaking begins with being dumb; true Life begins with death; true healing begins with sickness...

Whether we realize it or not, all of us are born sick, born blind, deaf and dumb and need a healing touch from God in order to be whole. What is the deadly disease we need to be healed from? It is the element of SIN which has a big "I" at the center of it. This disease permeates everything about us and the only remedy is for this "I" to be placed into Christ and laid to rest; to receive His Life in place of my own.

We, in our world where everything here and now is of utmost importance, view healings of the body and other visible miracles as great signs and wonders. But I've been increasingly impressed with how the unseen spiritual miracles may be of more value to God because they deal not with the temporal, but with the eternal. To us who live in this world, physical bodily resurrection and healing is a really big thing. But how much *more* of a miracle is spiritual resurrection from spiritual death and

spiritual healing from the disease of Sin and Self! The miracle of Christ in us is truly a great sign and wonder but one which may be unrecognised and unappreciated by most people. I am not saying that healing of the body is not important or needed, I am saying let's look beyond the obvious to what is not so easily seen: that we all need healing in a far deeper and eternal way than just in our bodies in the here and now.

This man in John 9 was born blind and so are we, so that the work of God in Christ can be displayed through us. We cannot see spiritual truth no matter how hard we look, we cannot see until God heals our blindness and opens our eyes. THEN we see, THEN spiritual truth is obvious! But true sight begins with blindness. We do not know what seeing is when we have never seen, because we are born blind. It is only when our eyes are opened that we know through experience what sight is.

What Jesus used to open the man's eyes was mud; a combination of the earth (which we are made from - Gen. 2:7; 3:19) and His own saliva, from His mouth, that which is used to digest food... To most people, using mud, or even just spit, would be offensive. Often God will use what we would view as offensive in order to bring healing and life and truth to us.

The mud is symbolic of what He uses to bring sight. We are made of earth, He will use us, His children, to bring healing and sight to people, we are dirt, nothing special, just ordinary earthy dirt but He mixes us with the pure, the transparent, the heavenly words from His mouth... words that help people digest Him (Bread, Water, Meat, Fruit) and words that enable people to then see Him. The dirt and spit become one; it has changed from being two things to one thing: mud. Not highly valued on this earth perhaps, but God can use anything and anyone He chooses! It does not mean what He uses is special, but that HE is special and not limited by us and our foibles, fears and weaknesses. The dirt had changed, for all intents and purposes, from being something earthly to something heavenly, even though with our physical eyes it might look no different! (This gives new meaning to the figures of speech of having mud in your eyes and your name being dirt in other's eyes!) And He applies this strange ointment, this combination of Him and us, to people's spiritual eyes in order that they might see Him...

What is the result? The man was sent to wash the mud off in the pool

(actually a fountain) of Siloam which means "Sent", apostello... So, we too are sent, so that many more spiritual eyes will be opened to see and know Him even if He does have to use something as "offensive" as dirt and spit and a good wash, and even if many of these miracles are not visible to the physical eye!

So the first result for this man was sight. The second result was that he had changed and others noticed it and questioned him, and he told them what had happened; the workings of God were being displayed and illustrated through him. Thirdly, in spite of the illustration and the undeniable fact of his sight, the religious would not accept it and interrogated him over it. They said "This Man [Jesus] is not from God, because He does not observe the Sabbath." They could not see beyond the Law of Moses to the Man who embodied the Law; they stumbled over the Rock.

We still see this happen today. It is so easy for us to be blinded by our own religious rules and beliefs; many of which may have become simply traditions of man. "What Would Jesus Do?" Even He Himself did not always know! He was being led by the Spirit of God! Even His disciples could not guess what Jesus would do as He so often did the opposite of what they would expect, and still does. To live according to what WE think Jesus would do, is to be governed and directed by our own flesh. Rather than living by what WE think Jesus would do, we can live as Jesus did: being led by the Holy Spirit of God. When God does something unexpected which does not agree with OUR way of seeing and thinking, we can easily become offended and fight against God.

Being "religious" is blinding because it causes people to think they do know and think they do see and this results in self-righteousness and pride. Pride always blinds, "having the power of seeing, they do not see; and having the power of hearing, they do not hear, nor do they grasp and understand. In them indeed is the process of fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, which says: You shall indeed hear and hear but never grasp and understand; and you shall indeed look and look but never see and perceive. For this nation's heart has grown gross (fat and dull), and their ears heavy and difficult of hearing, and their eyes they have tightly closed, lest they see and perceive with their eyes, and hear and comprehend the sense with their ears, and grasp and understand with

their heart, and turn and I should heal them." (Matthew 13:13-15). We have to die to our own opinions and ideas, turn from our stuck-in-the-mud views, lay down our lives, and know that we know nothing and only see in part...

The religious were not asking questions so that they could accept and understand what Jesus had done, they were asking questions in order to challenge and reject what He had done. They were not open to God, they were not adjustable or teachable: "They said to him, What did He [actually] do to you? How did He open your eyes? He answered, I already told you and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Can it be that you wish to become His disciples also? And they stormed at him and retorted, You are His disciple yourself, but we are the disciples of Moses. We know for certain that God spoke with Moses, but as for this Fellow, we know nothing about where He hails from. The man replied, Well, this is astonishing! Here a Man has opened my eyes, and yet you do not know where He comes from. That is amazing! We know that God does not listen to sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and a worshiper of Him and does His will, He listens to him. Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this Man were not from God, He would not be able to do anything like this. They retorted, You were wholly born in sin; and do you presume to teach us? So they threw him clear outside the synagogue."

The fourth result was that the man was an outcast of the religious community. Through no fault of his own, he had broken their rules. He no longer belonged there, Jesus had made him an outcast by giving him sight. Their rejection was because of Jesus and what He had done but they took it out on the man they could see. And the cost of being rejected, misunderstood and alienated was offset by what he had received: a personal touch from Christ enabling him to see! His sight was of infinite value! He couldn't deny the fact that he had been blind, but now could see and there was no going back; he couldn't un-see. That sight brought separation. Jesus addressed this by saying to him: "I came into this world for judgment as a Separator, to make the sightless see and to make those who see become blind. Some Pharisees who were near, hearing this remark, said to Him, Are we also blind? Jesus said to them, If you were blind, you would have no sin; but because you now claim to

have sight, your sin remains. If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but because you insist, We do see clearly, you are unable to escape your guilt." (John 9:39-41)

This conflict of what we see versus what we do not see is something which the believers in Acts also had to deal with and which we still have to deal with today. Peter in Acts 10:9-20 was offended and shocked by what God showed him and asked of him; but the Son had come and things which previously had been hidden, could now be seen in the full Light of day. Would he cling to the known and acceptable external forms which had been so important to him and his people? Or would he allow the Light to dawn and bring new understanding internally, even if it meant the external must become as nothing?

Remembering that in their culture the new day begins with night; the night time of shadows and types of the old covenant had passed and given way to the dawn of Christ, our Light and Sun by which we can now see in Spirit and in truth. "We must work the works of Him Who sent Me and be busy with His business while it is daylight; night is coming on, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the world's Light." He is still in this world in us as the Light of the world. If the night which is coming refers to the end of this world as we know it and the start of a new day, then it is only the eternal works of Him which will endure; all that is temporal and of the flesh will cease to be and only what is of God will remain. Do we, like Peter, still cling to the external and visible rather than seeing and believing the internal and invisible? Do we, like Peter, have the audacity to say to God, "No, by no means, Lord"? "What God has cleansed and pronounced clean, do not you defile and profane by calling common or unclean."

This blind man that Jesus healed, did not even ask for healing. "As He passed along, He noticed a man blind from his birth." Jesus noticed, Jesus healed. It was a gift of Grace! Some might argue that Jesus healed this man physically rather than spiritually. But later in the chapter we read: "Jesus... meeting him... said, Do you believe in the Son of God? He answered, Who is He, Sir? Tell me, that I may believe in Him. Jesus said to him, You have seen Him; [in fact] He is talking to you right now. He called out, Lord, I believe! [I rely on, I trust, I cleave to You!] And he worshiped Him." (9:35-38). Even though his physical eyes could see, the

man also needed to see and know Who Jesus was spiritually! It was not a case of either the physical or the spiritual but both. It is far more important to see spiritually than to see physically, and we know how important and precious our physical eyesight is to us.

It is not that physical healing is not important because it is; but, perhaps because it affects us personally and obviously, we seem to focus on physical healing almost to the exclusion of spiritual healing. Of course one will often lead to the other, when we are healed internally, it has to affect us externally also. When we can see, it changes our view of what is important, it changes our priorities completely and utterly.

Opened eyes and seeing things from God's perspective is such a precious gift of Grace to us. We are born blind so that the work of God in opening our eyes can be seen! May He heal not only our eyes and cause us to see Him, but also cause our deaf ears to hear Him and our dumb mouths to speak as Him, that He might have a Body full of Life here on this earth through whom He is seen and heard and known!

"But blessed are your eyes because they do see, and your ears because they do hear. Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous men yearned to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it." (Matthew 13:16,17)



Antichrist... but not as we've known it

"The love of Christ controls and urges and impels us, because we are of the opinion and conviction that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, so that all those who live might live no longer to and for themselves, but to and for Him Who died and was raised again for their sake. Consequently, from now on we estimate and regard no one from a human point of view." (2 Corinthians 5:14-16a)

The term "Anti-christ" when looked at in the Greek simply means any thing or any one who is in place of Christ or instead of Him in your life. The word 'anti' in the Greek does not just mean the opposite of something as it does in English, it also means *INSTEAD OF*, or *IN PLACE OF* - in other words, antichrist is not only that which is against Christ, but is also that which SUBSTITUTES itself for or instead of, Christ the Anointed One.

John was the only writer in the New Testament to use the phrase "antichrist" and he wrote that the spirit of antichrist was already here (1 John 2:18, 4:3). It seems that John's concept of antichrist was not just of a person (THE antichrist) as he spoke of antichrists (plural) and the spirit of antichrist. The spirit of antichrist is that which opposes or places itself in the place of, or instead of The Anointed (Jesus Christ), usurping the role and functions which are His alone. This is idolatry, for idolatry is anything and everything that takes the place of, or is instead of Christ in a person's life: *"For as far as this world is concerned, you have died, and your new, real life is hid with Christ in God... So kill, deaden, deprive of power the evil desire lurking in your members - those animal impulses and all that is earthly in you that is employed in sin: sexual vice, impurity, sensual appetites, unholy desires and all greed and covetousness, for that is idolatry, the deifying of SELF and other created things instead of God." (Colossians 3:3,5).*

So long as we are looking warily at others who may or may not be

"antichrist", we may be ignorant and blind to areas in ourselves which may be anti-Christ. It is a most devious and cunning deception to cause us to focus on someone or something "out there" while remaining completely blind or myopic when it comes to seeing the same sin in ourselves.

Anything that is in the place of or instead of something, is a substitute for the real thing, in other words: a counterfeit. We cannot see or know the real and genuine until we let go of the substitutes and illusions we cling to. Substitutes are normally not recognized for what they are until the real has been encountered. We can often be quite satisfied with a substitute, because it IS a substitute. "Trouble" only seems to arise when we encounter the real and genuine, because then the substitute is revealed for exactly what it is and will no longer suffice. When we know the real, then the substitute IS no substitute! We need to discern not whether something is a good thing (*"from now on we estimate and regard no one from a human point of view"*) but whether it is a God thing because there can be a world of difference between the two. Many of the natural "good things" which we may value, may in fact be antichrist - in place of Christ.

Compromise is Antichrist

One example is compromise and love. Compromise can be the substitute of divine Love (which includes bearing one another's burdens, longsuffering, forbearance, endurance, lovingkindness). We may think that we are very loving of someone or something because we tolerate much which we do not condone and yet we may not realize that it is not God's love at all, but a substitute: fleshly compromise. Compromise is encouraged these days as being Politically Correct, but compromise is based on the love of *Self* or *others* more than and rather than a deep love of God. We compromise when we fear man and so may not speak out about something because we do not want to offend or be maligned or rejected or thought ill of. Compromise is chosen because it looks good and feels good to our flesh. Divine Love, on the other hand, is based on love for God and of God and so has mercy only on what He has mercy on. Love desires only what the Beloved desires, to the exclusion of its own desires. While divine Love lays down and sacrifices Self and its will in favor of God and His will, compromise has the opposite effect; it puffs up Self by making it think that it is acting in love when in reality it is acting

from self-love which is only a substitute and counterfeit of God's love.

Divine Love comes from God and cannot come from us; it is from Him and of Him and for Him. God hates compromise because it is an unholy mixture which does not and cannot distinguish, discern and separate between what is holy and what is unholy; what is of the flesh and what is of the Spirit; what is of God and what is of ourselves. Instead it cloaks itself in pseudo-spirituality, religion and good works in order to deceive and blind us and others to the fact that it is a mere substitute and not the real thing. Divine Love is not blind; it sees very clearly and will see the unholy and because God's Love is holy, there is no compromise.

Natural Man is Antichrist

Perhaps one of the most devious substitutes in our lives is simply the natural man or Self; it is Self that wants to be in control and do things and make decisions, judgments, plans, methods, ways... even for God. Our intentions may be admirable but God is not impressed with anything that originates from Self. He sees and knows the motivations of our hearts even when we do not. Often it is OUR knowledge from OUR head that is ruling us and is anti (in place of) Christ in our life. We may not see this simply because it is idolatry; it is the idolizing of Self, and idolatry always blinds. The Bible is very clear that those who trust in idols, even unknowingly, become like them: blind, deaf and dumb. *"The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the WORK of MEN'S hands. Idols have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not, nor is there any breath (spirit) in their mouths. THOSE WHO MAKE IDOLS ARE LIKE THEM; SO IS EVERYONE WHO TRUSTS IN AND RELIES ON THEM."* (Psalm 135:15-18). Closely related to worshiping the idol of Self is worshiping the idol of someone else. It may be someone who has much of Christ evident in their lives, it may be someone who has much wisdom and maturity. We so naturally and easily look towards others for those things which God wants to provide for through His Son and His Life, NO MAN must take the place of Christ in our lives.

Religion is Antichrist

One aspect of this idol of Self is religion, which includes self-

righteousness and religiosity. It is a substitute that appeals to our flesh because it is again clothed in what appeals to us (things WE can do, say or help with and which may look good to others), and until and unless God unveils these things to us, we will not be able to see that they are a mere substitute in place of a vital, living, real relationship with our Father. The false is only revealed for what it is when the Real has been encountered. If you do not know the Real, then the false will seem perfectly adequate! Religion is a devious substitute because it LOOKS good, it looks as though God would be pleased with it, and it is all done in His name and ostensibly for His glory. But God's ways are not our ways and He is interested in our hearts before He is ever interested in what we do, because if your heart is right, then your "doing" will also be right. Religion is antichrist because it claims to be for Christ and yet takes the place of Christ. It is for man rather than for God and it results in bondage which takes the place of our freedom in and with Christ.

Pride is Antichrist

When God through grace unveils Himself to us, He also begins to unveil who we are because both revelations are necessary and go hand in hand. If we have just a revelation of God and not of ourselves, then we are in danger of pride; and if we have just a revelation of who we are and not Who Christ is, then we are in danger of false humility (which is just another form of pride) because we don't yet see ourselves through God's eyes as redeemed and loved in Christ. Both of these unveilings are necessary and they balance one another.

We discover that there is only One Thing about us which satisfies the heart and will of our Father and that is Christ as Head of our lives and substituting HIS Life in place of ours. And this One Thing in our lives is not brought about by anything we have done but by everything HE has done so that none of us can boast or take pride in ourselves. You cannot have two lives. You cannot have two heads. You cannot have two hearts. You cannot have two bodies. We must die to ourselves in order to truly know Life in Christ and to have His Head, His heart and His Mind and His Life. This is resurrection Life; we die and yet we truly live!

Our Knowledge is Antichrist

We are so used to having Self and our life in place of Christ and His Life that we automatically rely upon ourselves and our own knowledge; even good, Biblical, spiritual knowledge. Our knowledge and reasoning and judgments can again be mere substitutes which take the place of the full knowledge of Christ. He does not want us just to know things about Him, but to truly KNOW Him intimately and we cannot begin to know Him until we understand that in and from ourselves we know nothing! We might be very sure that we are right and that we know something; but if that something has not come to us personally through Christ and our experience in intimate relationship with Him, then that knowledge may simply be from our flesh and therefore highly suspect.

Our enemy is so deceitful that he will not hesitate to use truth as well as lies to accomplish his purpose of bringing bondage and death. Using truth is far more deceptive to both us and others because we may see only the truth which we already know and in seeing only that, we lose sight of He Who is Truth personified! Truth given as a law brings death. The Truth will only live and bring Life when it is given IN the Life and IN the Way - Christ. He is Love and His Truth will always bring Life and Liberty. When Truth is shared and received in His time and in His Way then it is Life. The three must go together, the Truth, Life and Way of Christ Who is Love. We are truly dumb, blind and deaf except for when Jesus touches us and heals us and causes us to see, speak and hear from His heavenly perspective, and then all that knowledge is of Him, from Him, and for Him!

Looking for Christ

While many may look for outward miracles of the deaf and blind being healed, let us never overlook the great unseen miracle of internal eyes being made to see, ears to hear and people being brought from death to Life in Christ! We are truly dead and lost until He finds us and resurrects us and then, and only then, do we truly live and know Life and know that we have been found! And in this finding and seeing and hearing, we find that in His amazing Love, He reveals and deals with the unholy mixture which has been so much a part of our natural lives...

"Pergamum... Here we have an awful state of mixture, contamination, compromise, entanglement with evil things. If we

seek for the cause, we find that the church in Pergamum has not discriminated between the things that differ, between what is of the Lord and what is not. It has compromised by reason of defective spiritual sight, and so the issue here, the matter of first love, is that first love is a discerning love. There is much about that in the Bible. Paul is rich on the matter of discerning love. *"...having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints"* (Eph. 1:18). *"The eyes of your heart enlightened"* discerning love. Love is as far removed from blindness as heaven from earth. "Love is blind"? No - not true love. The fact is that true love sees everything, but transcends everything. The love of Christ for His disciples was not blind love that did not know His men, love that was duped, deceived, misled, but eventually found out that they were not the men He thought they were. No, *"he... knew what was in man"* (John 2:24). His love saw everything, could tell them beforehand exactly what they would do; but love persisted in face of it all. Love is a great seeing thing. If you are consumed with a burning love for the Lord, you will be very quick of scent as to what is doubtful and questionable. You will not need to be frequently and continuously told when a thing is not right. No, love for the Lord will bring you quickly to see and to sense there is something that needs to be adjusted. You may not know what it is at the time, but you have a sense that all is not well. Love will do it. All the instruction in the world will not bring you to it. You may have the Word of God brought to you on all such points, and you might even say, "All right, because you say so, because it is in the Bible, I will do it, I will be obedient." Do you think that is good enough? Such a thing has never come to you through the eyes of your heart. But mark you, if this love, this discerning love, has really filled your heart by all the intelligence of the Holy Spirit indwelling you, you will sense it without being told; or if it should be brought to you from the Word, that within you will say, "Yes, I know that is right, the Lord tells me that is right." Do you not think that is the kind of Christian that is needed, and what the Lord needs at the end? That is what He has had in mind from the beginning and He calls that first love that is quick of scent to see what needs to be cut off or added, what adjustments are necessary, and does accordingly. You do not have to follow round and say, "Please do this; have you never taken note that you might be helpful

in this way?" You do not have to do that where there is devotion, love watchful all the time, aliveness, alertness, perception, readiness to do without being all the time told to do it. Real devotion to the Lord is something that far outreaches legality. First love is discerning love."

(From Chapter 6 of "His Great Love" by T. Austin-Sparks, at <http://www.austin-sparks.net/english/books/001273.html>)

This Love and this Life are completely different to anything we've known before. We grow up learning how to "discern" from the tree of good and evil and we learn to judge and reason with our minds what is good and what is evil. What we do not realize, is that in that state we are placing ourselves in the place of God; it is antichrist because it is the Spirit of Christ Whose role it is to judge and discern and reveal those things to us rather than US trying to see and decide things for ourselves. There is just no substitute for eating the fruit of the tree of Life and knowing God from the heart; the head cannot fathom it, the mind cannot understand it, but the heart KNOWS it to be Life and Truth! The heart is intimately involved, because it is a life and love issue. Love knows and recognizes its Loved One, always! Let us give up and look away from ALL that would distract and look only for the Real and accept no substitutes for Jesus the Christ! Instead of being motivated by fear of antichrist, let us be motivated by love for THE Christ!

God is Love and Love is not something you can know in your head, it is something which must be experienced in your heart. When we begin to know Him as Love and begin to apprehend just how much He truly does love us, we discover that not only have we reached the End to our search, but the Journey has also only just begun! Love only wants what the Beloved wants. Love is always looking and listening for the Beloved anywhere, in anyone, at any time; it does not matter who it is that He is recognized in or heard through because that person is never the focus and cannot take His place. Only this Beloved One is the focus because truly knowing Him and His Love deals forever with all mere substitutes. There can be NO substitute for Him in our lives! The eyes of our hearts have been opened and our eyes are ever looking for only One: looking away from everything and everyone else, looking always for just this One... And finding Him, the eyes and heart no longer wander, nor do they search any more because they have found their Love and Life!

"Let us strip off and throw aside every encumbrance and that sin which so readily (and cleverly) clings to and entangles us, and let us run with patient endurance and steady and active persistence the appointed course of the race that is set before us, looking away to Jesus, Who is the Leader and the Source of our faith and is also its Finisher, bringing it to maturity and perfection." (Hebrews 12:1b-2a)



Fear... but not as we've known it

And the Lord commanded us... to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive... Deut. 6:24.

All of us know what fear is, no definition is necessary. We know that it is a very powerful thing. We are very easily controlled and swayed by fear. People, churches, religions, governments and the media very effectively use the power of fear to control, intimidate, manipulate and motivate people.

Religion uses fear to control people and make them do what they "should". Religious Christians in particular are some of the most fearful (and consequently the most gullible) people and seem to be very susceptible to being manipulated by fear. Instead of encouraging each other to trust God, they encourage people to fear all sorts of things, including the enemy himself, the "last days", the mark of the beast etc! They are afraid of many things, and make others afraid too. They appear to give more credit to the ability of the enemy to attack and harm them, than to God's ability to protect them. It seems that they have more trust in the enemy and what he may do, than trust in God Himself and what He already HAS done! Their lives are a glaring contradiction to their own testimony.

Ironically, and in spite of this, fear is often used by these same ones as a fail-safe method for proving what is of God and what is not: they think that anything that causes them to fear cannot be from God and so they use fear as a means of "discernment". Of course, if this were actually applied to the fear inducing messages and theories that these people listen to and pass on to others, then they would never have accepted these messages in the first place!

Many people also use love to determine what is of God and what is not, and that is just as faulty and open to error as using fear. Idolatry is a form of love and our enemy will use love just as readily as he will use fear. I have met many religious people who appear to be very "loving"; in fact they can be sickeningly so because it is a fleshly religious love and not

the love of God at all. Looking for love becomes their focus, rather than looking for Christ and His Life.

We can't use fear, love, or any characteristics to "discern" what is God and what is not; He often offends our "rules" and our ways of determining things, like with Peter and the forbidden food in Acts chapter 10. The only way of knowing what is of God, is to *know Him*. And I don't mean a head knowledge based on what the Bible tells us about Him, but an intimate heart knowledge based on our experience of living in Christ and knowing Him living in us daily as our Life.

Who Do You Fear?

The Bible does mention one fear in a positive light; it speaks of *fearing God* as something positive and "for our good always, that He might preserve us alive". However, the fear of God is often viewed as something negative, perhaps because some people have been taught to be really afraid of God Himself without being taught that He is full of Love for them, so the reaction is to teach people not to fear God, and instead to emphasise only love.

We need to understand that God doesn't use fear to scare us into doing things, He uses fear to *protect* us! Fearing God is a God-given form of protection, "for our good always, that He might preserve us alive". This is a principle of God, like a law of nature, that protects and preserves Life! If there was ever a person who was genuinely not afraid of anything, they would probably not survive for very long and it is the same spiritually. But from our earthly human perspective *we do not spiritually know* what to fear and what not to and we usually fear the wrong things. And so the Bible clearly tells us to fear one thing: *God*. That fact is so rarely even mentioned today, that some may be offended at even the thought of it! Please bear with me as we examine this a little more, for I believe that it is crucial and "for our good always".

Both love and fear are very powerful things in our lives. Whatever or whoever we fear, we empower. We give access to our hearts and lives through both fear and love. Nowhere in the Bible are we told to fear the devil; to be wary of him, yes, but not ever to fear him! Yet the way some Christians talk and live, you'd think that the Bible said "fear the devil"

rather than "fear God"! Fear is linked with worship, because one of the outcomes of fear is reverence, awe and respect. This is why many tribal people worship what they fear. Who is it that wants our worship and wants us to fear him instead of God? The devil! Is he all-powerful and all-knowing? No! But he wants to deceive us into believing that he is... for then he robs God of what God alone is worthy of: our fear and our worship.

In the Bible God tells His people to not only love Him, but also to fear Him; yet the devil deceives people into thinking they should instead fear him, and love themselves. Our enemy is not only a liar, he is also a thief; he tries to take what God desires: both our love and our fear. When you become one with Christ you are part of Him and His Body and He is part of you, so WHY would you be afraid of this enemy whom He has *already defeated*? Instead you will increasingly discover and experience the reality of victory and freedom from fear through knowing Christ in you as your Life and Conqueror.

When we no longer fear our adversary, he no longer has any power over us. GOD is in control and not him, no matter how things may seem and no matter what people may say. There are many conspiracies and theories all based on fear, and you are responsible for what you listen to, believe and pass on. "You are not to say, 'It is a conspiracy!' in regard to all that this people call a conspiracy, and you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it. It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And *He shall be your fear*, and He shall be your dread." (Isa. 8:12-13).

What is the Fear of God?

Many think that the fear of God is simply respect and reverence. But there are words that meant respect or reverence in the original languages of the Scriptures and yet they were not used; instead the word used in the Greek is *phobos* and is where we get our English word *phobia* from; it means fear. I would like to be able to prove that the word means reverence and not fear, but it doesn't; and I know that is very difficult for us to understand and accept.

Yet we know from our own experience, and from what is in the

Scriptures, that one of the results of seeing and knowing God AS HE REALLY IS, is holy fear, because we simultaneously see and know who we are in comparison with God, and it is good for us to do so. But so many do not see Him... instead they see what the enemy does and fear him, or see what people do and say and fear man. Of course we are naturally fearful of those who can kill us and hurt us, but Jesus said, "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him Who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him." (Luke 12:4,5). HE is the only One worthy of our fear and through Christ and what He accomplished on the Cross, He has brought us into intimacy and union with God and this gives us boldness because we have received His Spirit and Life (Eph. 3:12; Heb. 10:19). He has not given us a spirit of cowardice or timidity (the KJV Bible has mistranslated this word into 'fear') but has given us His Spirit of Power, and of Love, and of calm self-control! (2 Tim. 1:7).

The more we see God as He really is, the more we acknowledge how magnificent and great He really is; and this results in an ever deepening awe and appreciation of Him and His Grace. We cannot have a full appreciation of Grace, without knowing this fear of God. A holy fear of God comes from knowing and seeing Him as He really is, and knowing and seeing ourselves for who we really are. When we fear something, we are acknowledging that what we fear is much greater than us and outside of our control and understanding. God IS great, magnificent, awesome and totally worthy of our fear! And yet He desires union, relationship and intimacy with each of us. But how can One so great and so fearful to us encourage us into intimacy with Himself? By coming to us in a Way in which we can accept Him: the Man Christ Jesus Who gave His life so that we, with Him, can be with God in intimate relationship as our *Father* - not just as God whom we fear, but also as the One Who gave birth to us and loves us so dearly!

There is a balance where we both love *and* fear God, for there IS fear in Love... Of course the verse which says "Perfect love casts out fear" will spring to mind and we need to note the context in which it was written. The context is speaking of a fear of *judgment and punishment*, and is not referring to the fear of God. The fear of God is not about what He may do to me, because that has already been settled in the work of the Cross:

"In this union and communion with Him love is brought to completion and attains perfection with us, *that we may have confidence for the day of judgment*, because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, dread does not exist, but full-grown (complete, perfect) love turns fear out of doors and expels every trace of terror! For fear brings with it *the thought of punishment*, and he who is afraid [of punishment] has not reached the full maturity of love." (1 John 4:17,18 Amp).

There are so many verses in the Bible that speak of fearing God in a good, positive and healthy way. Before Jesus came to this earth the Israelites already feared God, but they did not necessarily LOVE Him; and so the New Testament stresses love to balance their fear. However, many people today regard the Old Testament with disdain, despite the fact that the Old Testament is what Jesus Himself and His disciples quoted from and was the only "Bible" they knew. So below I have just a few of the *New Testament* verses about fearing God:

Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Cor. 7:1).

Submitting to one another in the fear of God (Eph. 5:21).

Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. (1 Pet. 2:17).

So the believers... enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they continued to increase. (Acts 9:31).

Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping Him with holy fear and awe. For our God is a devouring fire. (Heb. 12:28-29).

This fear of God prevents us from hurting Him by presuming upon His Love and His Grace, and from leaving His Way. This fear protects us from being separated from Him because there *is* fear in love: not only the fear of being separated from the loved one, but also the fear of letting them down and disappointing them. It is not a fear based on self-preservation as most human fear is, but a fear *for this One you love...* a fear that He may not receive all that He is so worthy of...

Why Fear God?

Why would God, Who loves us, want us to fear Him? It is hard for us to

understand, but perhaps one of the reasons is because He knows that it is in loving and fearing ONLY God, that we are then *set free* from all other loves AND from all other fears! Just as through knowing Love Himself all other loves pale by comparison, so in fearing Him Who is worthy of our fear, all other fears become inconsequential and nonexistent by comparison. *It is truly in fearing only God that we have nothing else to fear!* This fear of God brings true Life and *frees* us from all other fears.

Having lived with the Dayak people in Borneo for eight years of my life, I have witnessed first-hand how constraining and debilitating fear can be. Our fears make us captive to fear itself and imprison us in an awful bondage. But the fear of God is a place of safety and security which releases us and brings us freedom because we are now free to NOT be afraid of anything that either man or devil can do to us!

Many of us fear trusting God and anyone else. We are afraid to trust God because of a lie we are born believing. Until Truth is revealed to us as Christ, each of us grow up believing this lie: that we know what is best for ourselves and that we are in control of ourselves and our destiny. And so we fear anything that may threaten this illusion. We basically believe that we are God; which is a result of what occurred in the garden of Eden, "you will be like God, knowing the difference between good and evil..." (Gen. 3:5). Perhaps if Adam had feared God more, he would never have touched the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...

In the garden of Eden, even before they disobeyed God, Adam and Eve *were* afraid of something. God warned them about eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, "in the day that you eat of it *you shall surely die.*" (Gen. 2:16). They must have known what death was and this *fear of death*, the fear of separation from Life, was Adam and Eve's first fear: a *God-given fear* which was designed to *protect them and preserve Life* in relationship and intimacy. They must have been fully aware of what death was and feared it, because the serpent convinced them that what God had said was not true. He assured them that they would not die... and as a result of easing this God-given fear, they went ahead and ate and suffered the consequences. Death came and separation occurred; exactly as God had said. He was referring to a spiritual death rather than a physical one because spiritual death and spiritual Life are

just as real as the physical.

The fear of death/separation from Life was designed to protect and preserve Adam and Eve and their relationship with God, but instead they believed that God was holding out on them and that they were missing out on something. They were deceived into thinking that Self could be like God. And oh, how that message is still alive and well and still appeals to our flesh today! We still fear dying: dying to Self. And so we convince ourselves that we must avoid that death and instead protect, preserve and flatter Self, even if it means deceiving ourselves and ignoring much of what the Bible says, thus creating a false gospel and embracing the spirit of antichrist (something in place of Christ).

We don't always like or accept the truth, especially when we don't understand it or it doesn't fit in with *our* concept of Who God is or what He is like. But we need to love and desire *Truth* just as much as we love and desire *Grace* and not reject one at the expense of the other. Jesus Christ is full of Truth (which we often fear) AND Grace (which of course we love!) but *both* are essential because they balance each other (John 1:14). Often when someone feels convicted by Truth, it is "discerned" to be condemning and fear inducing and so the hands are clapped over the ears and no more will be heard; in spite of the fact that Jesus clearly said that He convicts those He loves! To reject conviction and training is to reject our Father, "For the Lord corrects everyone whom He loves, and He punishes every son whom He accepts and cherishes... Now, if you are exempt from correction and left without discipline in which all God's children share, then you are illegitimate offspring and not true sons at all." (Heb. 12:6,8). That is the way of a Father with a child; He is a good Father and protects us, and in telling us to fear Him, He is telling us something which is for our own good; always!

He knows us better than we know ourselves and knows our natural fears. Over and over again the first words that Jesus spoke to people were: "Don't be afraid"! Even John's reaction, he who had been the closest friend of Jesus on this earth, was fear. And Jesus said to him: "Don't be afraid..." (Rev 1:17). God has to undo the results of death and instead restore us to a relationship with Him where we know and trust Him as our Love and Life. And because He is our Life, we fear separation from Him (ie spiritual death). We cannot imagine separation from this One that we

desperately love, and we fear only Him. To fear God is to fear hurting Him, to fear disappointing Him, to be in awe of Him... because the fear of God brings a right understanding of Who He is and who we are; it brings humility, love, trust and adoration.

When Moses and the Israelites were in front of Mount Sinai, the people were afraid of God's presence. But Moses loved and desired God enough to risk approaching Him, even though He was God! Moses loved God more than he loved himself and he was prepared to risk his life. When you both love and fear God, you are not afraid to approach Him because you love Him so much that you will accept whatever He says or does; "God may kill me, but still I will trust Him..." (Job 13:15). This is where dying to Self comes in, because it is only as we die to Self that we are not afraid to approach Him as He is; we have nothing left to lose or keep alive; our one desire is simply: Him! We cannot truly fear God in the way He desires us to unless we die to Self.

And it is only as we learn to fear God in the way He desires that we begin to be set free from all other fears. I am not saying that we will never experience fear again on this earth, but certainly we need never be imprisoned, bound or controlled by fear ever again! Some may read this and think it sounds all very good in theory, but what about in practical day to day life? To those I would say that if it does not seem possible to you then that is good: because it is *not* possible for you to make yourself free of fear and the sooner you give up on yourself, the sooner Christ can step in and be All you need! Knowing and understanding something of the freedom which this fear of God brings is something which only He can do in us, and I pray that He will continue to open our eyes and our hearts to His Truth, Life and Way in all aspects of our lives.

Jesus used death itself to triumph over death and just as death has lost its power through His death on the Cross, so all fears lose their terror through fearing only God. "Since, therefore, His children share in flesh and blood, He in a similar manner partook of the same nature, that by going through death He might bring to nought and make of no effect him who had the power of death - that is, the devil - and also that He might deliver and completely set free all those who through the haunting fear of death were held in bondage throughout the whole course of their lives." (Heb. 2:14,15). Through Adam all of us have experienced death and

separation from God, but through the death AND resurrection of Christ we experience not only death but also resurrection in Christ. Through Adam all of us know fear, but through Christ we know the fear of God which abolishes all other fears. God redeems and uses what His enemy had intended for our demise, and He amazingly turns it into the very thing through which He brings us into Victory in Christ!

Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. (Rev. 15:3,4 J B Phillips).



The Enemy... but not as we've known it

"We are not unaware of his schemes... We are human, but we don't wage war as humans do. We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ." (2 Cor. 1:11; 10:3-5)

We have believed many lies about the liar himself. A lot of what we believe is not true at all. Most of our knowledge about the enemy of God is based on myths and traditions handed down by the church rather than being based on truth revealed and taught to us personally by God.

Most of us are taught that the name of God's enemy is "Satan". However, the fact is that in both Greek and Hebrew languages the word "satan" is *not a proper noun* (a name) at all - it is a common noun based on a verb that means to oppose or obstruct - so "satan" simply means "adversary" or "enemy"; someone who stands in opposition against you. In spite of this, almost all English translations treat the word as a name and capitalise it - even though satan is *not* a name and can refer to either a human or a spiritual enemy. One translation of the Bible (Young's) doesn't have the word "satan" in it; the word is correctly translated into English as "enemy" or "adversary" instead.

The word "satan" is used 27 times in the Old Testament, and of those 27 times only 15 of them are translated (or mistranslated!) as the name "Satan". If you look up "satan" in a Christian Lexicon, it may say that it is a proper noun because *that is the way that Christianity has misinterpreted the word*. In Judaism where the word originated, it has always meant an enemy, sometimes specifically with "the": the satan, the enemy. If "satan" was the actual name of the enemy, it could not have "the" in front of it - in Hebrew "the" is never used before a name so

ha'satan (the satan) cannot correctly be interpreted as being the name of an entity.

"In biblical sources the Hebrew term 'the satan' describes an adversarial role. It is not the name of a particular character. Although Hebrew storytellers as early as the sixth century B.C.E. occasionally introduced a supernatural character whom they called the satan, what they meant was any one of the angels sent by God for the specific purpose of blocking or obstructing human activity." [Elaine Pagels, "The Origin of Satan," 1995] <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=satan>

For example, if the word "satan" were the name of a spiritual entity, then these verses would make no sense:

"God raised up Rezon son of Eliada as an enemy (satan) against Solomon" (1 Kings 11:23). "The angel of the Lord took his stand in the way as an adversary (satan) against him" (Num. 22:22).

David, the man after God's own heart, is referred to as becoming a satan in 1 Samuel 29:4. David also used the word about others: "David said, What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should this day be adversaries (satan) unto me?" (2 Sam. 19:22).

Many also think "Lucifer" is our enemy's name. This comes from a fourth century Roman Catholic theologian who "translated" the Hebrew word "helel" (meaning "morning star" or "light bearer") into the Latin word "Lucifer" - which was Latin for Venus: the morning star. The word "Lucifer" occurs only once in the English Bible in Isaiah 14 and refers to Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, not "the enemy".

In the New Testament we're told to submit to God and resist the devil. The word translated as "devil" is "diabolos", and again it is NOT a proper noun or name, it is an adjective, a descriptive word. "Diabolos" means "false accuser" or "slanderer". "Diabolos" is used of women in Titus 2:3 and 1 Timothy 3:11, and refers to men in 2 Timothy 3:3. Clearly it is not just an unseen spiritual enemy who accuses and slanders, it is also *us humans*.

The only names we are given for the enemy are Belial (2 Cor. 6:15), and Beelzebub/Beelzebul (2 Kings 1:2,3; Matt. 10:25; 12:24-27; Luke 11:15-19) but perhaps it is more valuable to know how our enemy functions than it is to know what to call him....

The Work of the Enemy

We know that the enemy is very cunning and snake-like: a false accuser, oppressor, murderer, tempter, seducer, slanderer, deceiver, liar, stealer; one who blinds, confuses, distracts; and is like a lion and an angel of light.

"Devil", meaning an accuser, is particularly interesting because the accusations we receive are typically through other people. While sometimes we may feel accused and condemned from within, too often we also receive accusations from without. Jesus warned us that we would be accused of many things, just as He Himself was: "It is enough for a student to become like his teacher and a slave like his owner. If they have called the owner of the house Beelzebul, they will certainly call the family members the same name" (Matt. 10:25). So we should not be surprised when we are falsely accused.

We must be aware of this scheme and tactic of our enemy so that we do *not* accept false accusations, or in turn be accusers of Family members ourselves. Instead we need to be supporting one another, standing up for and defending one another, and always thinking the best of one another. No good father likes to see his children fighting and accusing each other, and our Father is no different. Accusations cause rifts and divisions in what God desires to be One. With us so ready to accuse, criticise and slander one another, it is *us* who often do the enemy's work!

And there is a very fine line between "speaking the truth in love", and falsely accusing someone. There seems to be two extremes of thinking in this area. Some believe that love means they must point out whatever they see that is "wrong", while others believe that if they say nothing and just accept whatever is wrong without giving correction, that is truly loving. The fact is that *both* extremes may be wrong and unloving because it depends on *who* is governing in the situation: yourself or the Spirit of God.

Sometimes we *want* to speak out, and sometimes we don't want to - but that is not to be what governs us. The truth is that sometimes Love requires us to speak out, and sometimes Love requires us to say nothing - we simply *don't know* what is best in any situation; there is no rule we can apply. We must be governed continually by the only One who *does* know!

I have often been a "good" accuser and have also received accusations. What I want to expose here is *why* this occurs and how we can avoid being an accuser/devil and enemy/satan to others. I'm not suggesting that there is no spiritual enemy. It is quite obvious that there is - I don't think that needs proving - we know it from Scripture and we know it from our own personal experiences. What I *am* suggesting is that we have given the enemy not only a name that isn't his, but often a power and control that isn't his either. He loves to delude us into thinking that he is more powerful than he is and make us afraid of him, but *he is not God!* He is a *defeated* enemy! Regardless, it is usually not our mutual spiritual enemy that we have to deal with directly, but with quite another enemy that he does not want us to see....

The Cause of Enmity

The Hebrew word "satan" was transferred to the Greek. Jesus used it when He rebuked Peter in Matthew 16, "Get out of My way enemy/satan". He wasn't saying that His friend Peter was suddenly *the* enemy; He was exposing just who our main enemy/satan is: *our old nature - the way that we as humans naturally think*.

It was Peter's *natural* compassion, pride, and even His friendship with Jesus that made him say what he did. It seems perfectly right to us, because he was responding out of his natural love and concern, and yet Jesus called it *enmity and opposition to God*. Jesus went on to make this even clearer, "You are tempting Me to sin. You aren't thinking the way God thinks, but the way humans think" (Matt. 16:23) - Peter was speaking as an enemy/satan of God.

This enemy of our old nature is so subtle and devious that we may think we are perfectly right and yet have absolutely *no idea* that we are

opposing God. Even if our motivations and intentions are honourable and good (as were Peter's) the *source* of our words and knowledge can still be in opposition to God because they may originate from *us* instead of from Him. The problem is that so often we think *we know*, and are right, and so God has to say to us, "Get out of My way, you aren't thinking the way I think, but the way humans think".

The source of criticism, accusations, and "helpful advice" is our pride. In Peter's case, pride caused him to criticise *the Son of God* and tell Him what He should and shouldn't do. And our pride can cause us to tell sons and daughters of God what we think they should or shouldn't do too.

It is absolutely critical that we learn to discern between criticism or accusation, and what is true *spiritual discernment and correction*.

Spiritual discernment is essential - without it we will just accept anything that sounds good and appealing to us - without discerning its source. But when we criticise and accuse someone based on what we perceive to be wrong, it is usually because we believe ourselves to be *right*. Pride makes us think we *know* and *need* to correct what we think is wrong.

That is not to say that God doesn't correct us through others because, of course, He does. It is also pride that can prevent us from hearing Him through another - either because we think He should speak to us directly Himself or because we think we already *know*... our knowledge and pride are great enemies of God. We can even be found fighting against God without realising it (see Acts 5:38,39).

We need to read the third and fourth chapters of the book of James - pride is a *major* enemy of God and therefore a major enemy of all who are in Christ.

Our Worst Enemy

We ourselves are often our own worst enemy as well as God's. Our pride, fear, and unbelief (they are connected) can prevent God from revealing more of Himself to us, and through us, to others. Christ must become greater and more important to me, but I must grow less and less important. He must be superior in my life, and I must be inferior (John

3:30). He is, of course, already far greater and far superior, but you wouldn't know it to see how we typically think, speak, and act....

God's enemy tempts us to do things *independent of Christ* by trusting and relying on ourselves: believing and listening to ourselves (or others) instead of God. At the root of all temptation is an appeal to self - we are constantly tempted to listen to ourselves and believe our judgments, and put ourselves and whatever concerns us before all else.

We really need a revelation of ourselves just as much as we need a revelation of Christ. And we need a revelation of the necessity of the progressive daily work of the Cross *in us* just as much as we need a revelation of the once-and-for-all work of Christ on the Cross *for us*. We have so much to learn and so much to unlearn... and that makes our pride all the more absurd and abominable!

Some can see nothing wrong with themselves, they believe that because God made man in His image and loves them, He doesn't judge or correct them. This leads to the conclusion that they, in themselves, are inherently good, holy, and that they are guiltless with nothing to repent from. Oh, how we deceive ourselves... we love such a conclusion *because we love ourselves* - but this message is an *illusion generated by pride*. It is what *man* teaches, and is *not* what the Holy Spirit of God or the Scriptures teach (see Heb. 12:5-13).

I have died and my real life is above with Christ, but that revelation and truth takes a lifetime to be fully apprehended and fulfilled in my humanity. When our spirits have been born from above our spirit is instantly a new creation, but until the day we die we still have our soul or old nature (our thoughts, feelings, desires) to deal with because that part of us is still *in the process* of being changed and transformed! (See Rom. 12:2; 13:14, Gal. 4:19, Jam. 4:1-3, Col. 3:1-14.) Even Jesus was tempted to preserve Himself and listen to Himself instead of His Father.

We need to be saved from ourselves! When we see ourselves for who we really are, we see that it is *mercy* that we desperately need. As one friend puts it, "Grace is getting what I don't deserve, Mercy is NOT getting what I DO deserve".

A message that emphasizes only grace can be used to encourage our old nature that is at enmity with God, but needing mercy admits that we are *all wrong* and need saving. We only think we don't need mercy if we are full of pride. Encouraging us to believe that we are all good and right is one diabolically successful scheme of the enemy to rob God and keep us in bondage to self.

And here we need to beware of being too introspective as that makes your perspective all about you yet again. Concentrating on yourself, whether as a good or bad person, means you are not concentrating on Christ. We cannot afford to be in bondage to self. We are naturally the centre of our lives, but we have to *forget* about ourselves, lay ourselves aside, and discover Christ as the centre of everything.

Our pride gives the enemy of God an advantage, but humility gives God the advantage. "The Lord has told you what is good, and this is what He requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). Only those who have seen themselves for who they really are will know genuine humility and will know and love Mercy. Only those who have seen themselves in the Light of Christ will stop accusing their Family's members.

In Conclusion...

We are never devoid of personal responsibility. We are responsible for our words, our actions, and our decisions. Some people blame their failings on other people or on circumstances, while some people blame the enemy - as though he has complete and utter control of their lives! And some people accept that they themselves are the only one to blame....

When we accept that we alone are responsible, *then* we are ready to be corrected, ready to turn away from our wrong thinking and wrong beliefs. Then God has something to work with and pours out mercy! He will not encourage stubborn pride and self-will, "For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh (craving for sensual gratification) and the lust of the eyes (greedy longings of the mind) and the pride of life (assurance in one's own resources or in the stability of earthly things)—these do not come from the Father but are from the world" (1 John 2:16 AMP).

The Scriptures are very clear that even though God loves us dearly, He still judges *everything* that is an enemy and opposed to Him, and that includes our pride (Prov. 16:5; 1 Pet. 5:5; 1 John 2:16). It also includes God-given things when those things take the place in our heart that belongs to God alone. What happened to Israel as God's original chosen people ought to be illustration enough to prove that fact to us! They were rejected and judged because they chose to trust themselves and their own judgments instead of believing and trusting God. And God holds them responsible for that choice.

The best way to deal with darkness and the enemy is simply to live in the Light - to give no place to accusation or criticism, but be open and honest with God and one another. You only stay in the dark if you have something to hide. "If we say, 'We have a relationship with God' and yet live in the dark, we're lying. We aren't being truthful. But if we live in the light in the same way that God is in the light, we have a relationship with each other. And the blood of His Son Jesus cleanses us from every sin. If we say, 'We aren't sinful' we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:6-8). The antidote to the enemy of pride is to see ourselves as we really are, to repent from our proud ways, to love mercy, and walk humbly with God and with each other.

Some people are obsessed with the enemy and think he is behind everyone and everything and that is their focus. *They are bound and limited by the one they focus on.* And what an awful one to concentrate on and be limited by!

Some people are obsessed with themselves - in either a positive or negative way - and whether it is because they think themselves good or bad, they remain the centre of their universe and they themselves are their own focus. *They are bound and limited by the one they focus on.*

And some people are obsessed with Jesus Christ... and in seeing something of the awesome, vast greatness of Him, they *lose sight* of themselves and their enemies... keeping their eyes fixed on Him and looking away from all else (Heb. 12:1,2) especially looking away from

themselves. *They are released and unlimited because of the One they focus on!* And what an awesome and all-encompassing Person to concentrate on!

So much depends upon where our focus is - with what we see or do not see spiritually. Instead of focusing on the enemy, others, or ourselves, our salvation is found in concentrating on only One: Jesus Christ. When He fills our vision, our thoughts, our lives, then there is no room for any other and the kingdom of our own world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He will reign forever and ever!

"Dear children, you belong to God. So you have won the victory over these people, because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." (1 John 4:4)



Warfare... but not as we've known it

[Pilate asked Jesus] "What did you do?" "My kingdom," said Jesus, "doesn't consist of what you see around you. If it did, my followers would fight so that I wouldn't be handed over to the Jews. But I'm not that kind of king, not the world's kind of king." (John 18:36)

So very many things in the spiritual are the opposite of the earthly and not at all what we would naturally think; God's ways are so different to ours! When it comes to spiritual warfare, we know that the weapons of our warfare are NOT of this world because we are not of this world and that we are involved in a spiritual warfare rather than a physical one. Although we know this in our heads, in practice we still often apply our natural knowledge of war and fighting to the spiritual and as a result we end up fighting with flesh and blood weapons, perhaps not physically, but certainly with words. Words are powerful and must be used wisely and be God-directed: "The tools of our trade aren't for marketing or manipulation, but they are for demolishing that entire massively corrupt culture. We use our powerful God-tools for smashing warped philosophies, tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God, fitting every loose thought and emotion and impulse into the structure of life shaped by Christ." (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

Too often we see with our natural eyes and think we know what to do or say but the truth is that we DON'T KNOW. "Looking at his disciples, Jesus said, "Do you have any idea how difficult it is for people who 'have it all' to enter God's kingdom?" The disciples couldn't believe what they were hearing, but Jesus kept on: "You can't imagine how difficult. I'd say it's easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for the rich to get into God's kingdom." That set the disciples back on their heels. "Then who has any chance at all?" they asked. Jesus was blunt: "No chance at all if you think you can pull it off by yourself. Every chance in the world if you let God do it." (Mark 10:23-27).

It is just as difficult for those of us who think we "have it all" and "know it

all" and consider ourselves rich spiritually to enter into the kingdom of God as it is for those who may be physically rich. The kingdom of God is where God sovereignly rules and we do not. Religion can make us think that we are spiritually rich and in need of nothing; that we know what God would want and so we basically rule our own kingdom. We have to be shown that we are in fact poor and need Christ as everything. That last verse in the Amplified says: "With men [it is] impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God."

Our Enemies

It is when we know without a doubt how impossible we are and that we desperately need all that Christ is, that God can step in and make all things possible! God's kingdom is where He sovereignly rules and there is no chance of being part of His rule when we think we can do things (ie rule!) ourselves. This is indeed a battle and a war; this is spiritual warfare but not as we've known it! Instead of this spiritual warfare being external and out there somewhere, it is instead internal; it is warfare between our kingdom and God's; between our will and God's. It is a battle to see who will prevail: Self through pride and presumption, or God through our yieldedness and submission.

What is often referred to as "spiritual warfare" in this day and age usually amounts to nothing more than religious flesh; it loudly assails an enemy who is ALREADY defeated (but doesn't want us to know it) while ignoring the enemy within: us and our flesh - in particular, our religious flesh which delights in the illusion of having power and in doing things and being seen to be doing things. This so called "spiritual warfare" seems to be more motivated by preservation of self and fear of our enemy than by trust and faith in our Victory who is Christ! The way some people speak sounds as though they think the enemy is in control and not God and they are in fear of him; but God desires us to know HIM and to not be deceived by the many illusions that the deceiver uses to distract and intimidate us.

"The main objective of the forces of evil is by some means - no matter how - to rob the believer of real spiritual fighting force; not talking force, working force, organizing force, advertising force, holding-and-going-to-meeting force, listening-to-teaching force, soul

force; but genuine fighting force in which the impact of the victory of the Christ of Calvary by the Cross is registered upon the forces back of the human and worldly elements - the "principalities and authorities, the world rulers of this darkness, and the hosts of wicked spirits in the heavenlies" (Ephesians 6:12). Spiritual effectiveness is decided there, and not amongst the things seen. It is because of this that the enemy is well pleased amongst the spiritually superficial or unspiritual "Christians" to carry on a campaign of works and activities, programs, institutions, meetings, and churches... and allow or foster a certain kind of success imitative of good, but in which there is nothing that gets beyond time and earth and is lacking in that constituent which affects his hold upon the situation... it must be settled that the measure of spiritual effectiveness - the measure in which we count in the presence of the unseen forces - is just the measure in which we have come by the Cross to the place where we know - and live accordingly - that it is not in or of ourselves to serve God... that no resource of ours can count as an effectual basis... that God must do it in us and through us... and that all means, methods, forces, times, enablements must be out from Himself." (*T. Austin-Sparks - Satan's Main Objective*)

One of the reasons this "do-ing" is so engrained in us is simply because it is our nature - we are sons of Adam and daughters of Eve - it is our human nature to make decisions and judgments ourselves. In the garden of Eden they both chose to be independent from God. We are so used to being in charge, doing things ourselves and being lord of our own lives, making up our own minds about things and being the ruler of our own little kingdoms... but that Adam must die so that the last Adam (Christ) can live and reign in us and through us instead: "The first man Adam became a living being, an individual personality; the last Adam (Christ) became a life-giving Spirit restoring the dead to life. But it is not the spiritual life which came first, but the physical and then the spiritual. The first man was from out of the earth, made of dust (earthly-minded); the second Man is from out of heaven. Now those who are made of the dust (earth) are like him who was first made of the dust (earthly-minded); and as is the Man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven (heavenly-minded). And just as we have borne (worn) the image of the man of dust, so let us also bear (wear constantly) the image of the Man in heaven. But I tell you this, flesh and blood cannot become partakers and

inherit or share in the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable." (1 Cor. 15:45-50).

It can take a lot to break us of this habit of relying on ourselves and what we think we see and what we think we can do (particularly in spiritual and religious things) and to instead see that we truly know nothing apart from Christ. Do we still think we can DO anything in ourselves to please or satisfy God? If so, then we are still in the place of thinking we 'have it all'... We can only see and know our Father and truly submit to Him and His authority when we have given up on ourselves and surrendered all that we are. This was the case even for Jesus; He was totally dependent on His Father and did not do or say things just because it seemed like He should; He did NOTHING from Himself so that He could be ruled and governed by His Father (John 5:19,30; 8:28) and this was not what people expected: "The chief priests accused him of many things. So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of." But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed." (Mark 15:3,4 NIV). This, indeed, was warfare; but not as we have ever known it!

Warfare in the Bible

In the Old Testament, fighting and warring are mentioned many times. The principle which is shown to be true again and again is that GOD is the One Who causes the battle to be won. "The Lord your God Who goes before you, He will fight for you just as He did for you in Egypt before your eyes" (Deut 1:30). Whenever the Israelites got complacent or presumptive about winning and went into battles without asking God, the result was defeat. In the case of Gideon (Judges 7), it seemed impossible to win with so few men so that God could clearly show that it was not about man or the number of men and what we do, but ALL about God and what He can do when we are fighting in conjunction and in cooperation with Him. We usually tend to do things the other way around; WE decide what we think we need to assail and fight and we expect God to fight in conjunction and cooperation with us because we assume that our judgment is right. Everything hinges upon who is lord and king of our lives; whether ourselves or God! Sometimes what God may require of us will seem to be the opposite of what our "good" commonsense would tell us. In 2 Chron. 20 is the story of a battle in which the people were weak

and did not know what to do; God told them not to fight but to simply stand still and watch the deliverance God brought them; it was His battle. With Elisha and his servant it was not about what was seen here on earth, but about what was true in the unseen heavenlies (2 Kings 6). These principles have not changed; but just like Elisha's servant, we need our eyes, minds and hearts opened to see from heaven's perspective.

There are not very many references to warfare in the New Testament, one Greek word which is sometimes translated as 'fight' is "agonizomai". Its primary meaning is to compete and contend in a contest like in the Olympic games and in that sense it is a type of fight or contest. That is not how we typically think of fighting though, and this word 'agonizomai' is used in the following verses and is where we get our English word "agony" from:

"Strive to enter by the narrow door" (Luke 13:24)

"Fight the good fight of faith and claim eternal life." (1 Tim. 6:12)

"Now every athlete who goes into training conducts himself temperately and restricts himself in all things." (1 Cor. 9:25)

"For this I labor, striving with all the superhuman energy which He so mightily enkindles and works within me." (Col. 1:29)

Then there are another five Greek words (strateia, strateuomai, mache, machomai and polemeo) which all do mean fighting in the sense in which we think of fighting: a battle or war. They are mostly used in a negative context though. Paul wrote to Timothy: "The servant of the Lord must not be quarrelsome (fighting and contending - "machomai"). Instead, he must be kindly to everyone and mild-tempered; he must be a skilled and suitable teacher, patient and forbearing and willing to suffer wrong." (2 Tim. 2:24). Being patient, forbearing and willing to suffer wrong IS warfare; but again, not as we've known it. Instead of taking things into our own hands, and defending ourselves or proving ourselves right and fighting in that way, we instead submit and yield all to God in recognition and trust in the knowledge and fact that GOD KNOWS ALL. The battle is His!

That takes all responsibility for revenge, vindication, justification and defending ourselves out of our hands; we are HIS and He takes care of His own! T. Austin-Sparks writes: *"Everything depends upon our*

lowliness, meekness, patience, our forbearing one another in love, our eagerness to keep the unity. Does that challenge us? But those are our spiritual weapons in the field, and much grace and faith is needed if they are to be used effectively." Yes, using those weapons means we stay on heavenly ground where our enemy has no ground in us. If we instead get involved and respond from our soul or natural life, then we are no longer in Christ, instead we are taking things into our own hands and using the carnal weapons of this world, and in so doing, we expose ourselves to attack because we are no longer hidden in Christ; we are operating from ourselves instead of from Him.

Often we think we are being attacked by the enemy and blame things on him when in fact what is happening is that we have exposed ourselves to attack by doing things from our carnal nature instead of remaining hidden and protected in Christ. When we repent and return to our Place of Rest, we find that the battle is taken care of through Him: "He gives us more grace... That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:6,7). Most of the emphasis in teachings on verse 7 seem to be about resisting the enemy and telling him to go in Jesus Name as though that is some magic formula. It seems to me that the key to resisting is not so much in telling him to go, but in the words previous to it: Grace is given to the *humble*; to those who know they cannot and who yield and fully surrender themselves to God and know Jesus Christ as Lord of all!

The same word 'resist' is also used in Ephesians 6:13: "Put on God's complete armor, that you may be able to *resist* and stand your ground on the day of danger, and, having done all, to stand." So what is God's complete armour? All of the armour is representative of Christ and we are hidden and protected by Him and through Him so long as we stand and remain and dwell in Him. The battle has already been won and now our enemy simply seeks to get us *out* of Christ and onto the ground of *our flesh* - that is, to do or say something which is from US and not from Christ; to rely on ourselves and not Christ; to trust ourselves and not Christ; to believe in our ability to do something instead of believing in only Christ. Whenever that happens, we provide our enemy with legitimate ground to attack and fight us on (he is a legalist). As long as we live and rest in Christ and in His finished work at Calvary, then Christ Himself is

our Victory and Armour and Defense as well as Offense. But staying in that Place of Rest can often be very, very difficult for our flesh - to do nothing from ourselves when we see such need and when everything seems so hopeless is not natural for us and it takes the supernatural ability of the Holy Spirit to enable us to simply stand, and trust and to wait on God! THAT can be real warfare!

The very first thing mentioned in the armour in Ephesians 6 is Truth: we must know Christ as Truth - Truth revealing and unveiling not only Who Christ is, but also who we are... When we know Him as Truth we then stand in Him as our Righteousness - our right-standing before God in Him. Wherever our feet take us we are prepared for whatever may come by knowing as reality in our experience the good news of Christ as our Peace, Rest, Safety and Security. Our shield is our confidence, assurance and trust in Christ - knowing that through death He has defeated our enemy and raised us from death to Life in Himself! Our head and mind is protected, preserved, delivered and saved in Christ! And, of course, the sword of the Spirit is again: Christ - the Word of God.

Only two of the references for war and battle in the New Testament speak positively of us warring and fighting (*there is a full list of references for these Greek words given at the end of this article for those who are interested in studying them for themselves*) and these verses are:

"For though we walk (live) in the flesh, we are not carrying on our warfare according to the flesh and using mere human weapons. For the weapons of our warfare are not physical [weapons of flesh and blood], but they are mighty before God for the overthrow and destruction of strongholds" (2 Cor. 10:3,4 AMP)

"This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare" (1 Tim. 1:18).

These verses speak of the spiritual battle which we are all a part of by default, by being part of Christ and His Body. It is the Head that decides where the Body goes and what the Body does; so we too are involved in this warfare simply because we are part of Christ's Body. In both of those verses the words "strateia" and "strateuomai" are used; they mean

warfare and, interestingly, is where our English word 'strategy' is derived from. Paul's words to Timothy seem to speak of a battle/warfare in the mind and soul - a battle for Life where we need to believe and trust in God and what He says to us instead of what we think ourselves or what others may say. Paul refers to this war within himself in Romans 7:23 and goes on into chapter 8 recognizing that only in and through Christ are we delivered and set free! This warfare can be very hard work and a real battle because we are usually more comfortable trusting ourselves and what we think we know rather than trusting God and believing what He says even if it means not necessarily knowing or understanding many things! This is a battle in which we don't go by what our physical senses may tell us or by what we think we know, but by what our Father reveals to us to be Truth - Truth which we don't just give lip-service to, but which we KNOW through experience and through the eyes of our hearts being enlightened/opened to see.

True Faith comes when we have no faith ourselves; too often we are so busy looking at ourselves and trying to 'have faith' and do what we think Father and others want or expect, that we do not see Christ Who IS Faith and Who alone can be Faith in us! Having faith is not something we DO, we cannot make ourselves have the faith and trust required. We are not only hopeless but also helpless. We become nothing so that Christ can be Everything. True spiritual warfare is not something WE can do in and from ourselves; it is knowing what Christ has DONE and yielding to Him and standing in Him in that knowledge; trusting and knowing Him in reality as our Victory, our Conqueror, our Armour - our All!

"Little children, you are of God [you belong to Him] and have [already] defeated and overcome them [the agents of the antichrist], because He Who lives in you is greater (mightier) than he who is in the world." (1 John 4:4 Amp.).

References for fighting and warfare:

Agonizomai (compete, contend, contest) - Luke 13:24; John 18:36; 1 Cor. 9:25; Col 1:29; 4:12; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7.

Agon (place of racing, contesting) Philip. 1:30; Col. 2:1; 1 Thess. 2:2; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7; Heb. 12:1.

Mache (fight) - 2 Cor. 7:5; 2 Tim. 2:23; Titus 3:9; James 4:1.

Machomai (fight) - John 6:52; Acts 7:26; 2 Tim. 2:24; James 4:2.

Polemeo (war) - James 4:2; Rev. 2:16; 12:7; 13:4; 17:14; 19:11.

Polemos (war, battle) - Matt. 24:6; Mark 13:7; Luke 14:31; 21:9; 1 Cor. 14:8; Heb 11:34; James 4:1; Rev. 9:7,9; 11:7; 12:7,17; 13:7; 16:14; 19:19; 20:8.

Strateia (warfare) - 2 Cor. 10:4; 1 Tim 1:18.

Strateuomai (to war) - Luke 3:14; 1 Cor. 9:7; 2 Cor. 10:3; 1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 2:4; James 4:1; 1 Pet 2:11.



Temptation... but not as we've known it

Consider it wholly joyful, my brethren, whenever you are enveloped in or encounter trials of any sort or fall into various temptations. Be assured and understand that the trial and proving of your faith bring out endurance and steadfastness and patience. But let endurance and steadfastness and patience have full play and do a thorough work, so that you may be perfectly and fully developed, lacking in nothing. *James 1:2-4*

Until we discover Life in Christ, we are geared towards all that is of this earthly life and we naturally interpret many spiritual things through our earthly paradigms. Even something like temptation we look at through our natural, earthly eyes. When we speak of temptation, most of us immediately think of the obvious earthly temptations of our flesh without realising that the prime temptations may not be earthly but spiritual: wanting to see and have and hold and feel and do what I believe God wants, *now*. Many would not recognize that as temptation and would not see it as sin to give in to that temptation either. Yet this is what we see in religion, including Christianity: people see something they think God would want them to do and set about doing it! The primary definition for the Greek word for "tempt" means "to try whether a thing can be done, to attempt, endeavour". It is not doing God's will in God's way, instead it is anti-christ - doing something in place of and instead of Christ and His Life.

Unbelievers know exactly what physical temptation is, but they don't know what spiritual temptation is because their life does not revolve around Christ. It is our way of life to be not only influenced, but governed by what we see, hear and think rather than responding to Christ and His Life within us and being governed by Him. We know that impatience can cause us to act in the flesh, but so can supposedly 'good' things! It is temptation but not as we've known it...

Compassion is one example which I've written about elsewhere ("Touch

Not My Anointed"... but not as we've known it) not many people think of compassion as being temptation and yet it is temptation if that compassion is from me rather than from Christ and His Life because it is not *what* I do so much as *why* I do it. Who is the source of my motivation? What is the real reason for my action? Am I being moved by Christ in me and what He is desiring to do, or by my own feelings or what I think He might want? Am I motivated by what I feel obligated to do and what others expect me to do? Am I truly being led by God, or am I being led by my own temperament and natural inclinations? Only God can reveal the truth to us - it is not a matter of good or bad, right or wrong, but death (our flesh) or Life (Christ)!

Peter, whether he was telling Jesus not to wash his feet or not to go to the cross, or was cutting off a soldier's ear, was acting and reacting based on what he saw and what he could do or say to "help" Jesus. And Jesus viewed that as being the enemy tempting Him.

It is vital that we learn to see and discern with our spiritual senses rather than with our physical senses. Are we really seeing that Christ is living in us? The Head and the Body are ONE, they cannot be separated or death is the result. Do we really know that Jesus is building His Temple and taking care of His own Body? "How can He not???" is perhaps a better question! His will is being done on earth as it is in heaven and what is true in the heavenlies has an outcome and expression here on earth, although perhaps not always what we would expect, or in our lifetime or our timeframe. God works outside of our time restrictions and one of the most difficult temptations for us as His children is related to time...

Time

This is an age-old temptation. It was an issue for our brothers and sisters under the old covenant just as it is for us today: Moses tried to lead the people before the right time; Abraham didn't wait for Isaac but tried to make the promise of God happen in his own way and time; the Israelites didn't wait for Moses at Mt Sinai but built a golden calf instead...

Temptation can be related to time in two ways: either we are tempted to make something happen now that we simply need to wait for, or we are tempted to wait for something which we need to have now. For instance,

some wait for things to happen in the sweet by-and-by which our Father desires us to know the truth of NOW, e.g. knowing and experiencing Christ, Salvation, Rest, Resurrection and Glory *now*! Some think that our time here on earth is of no real consequence and that everything in terms of God's desires are in the future when we die, therefore we don't need to enter into Christ as Rest now, or be resurrected in spirit now or do anything now. Believing this lie creates a mentality which prevents us from entering into the fullness of what God intends for Himself and for us here on earth.

The other side is to see something that needs to happen here, especially when it is God Who has revealed the need, the temptation is to go and do it straight away. I don't know that any of us like to wait; it is uncomfortable and can be agonizing - perhaps because we are not in control of time! But if we run ahead of God, we can rob both Him and ourselves of the opportunity of seeing Him be All. What, when and how He does things is beyond our understanding.

Why does Father tell us or show us something He desires to have happen (like the promises He gave to the Israelites) and then have us just wait? Perhaps to enable us to become strong in Faith, to discipline and train us in His ways, to know that we, in and of ourselves, can do *nothing*; to keep us utterly dependent upon Him, and ultimately be amazed and overawed at seeing HIM move in His time and way in bringing fulfillment! This temptation to go ahead and do something instead of waiting for God and His timing, does bring suffering; it is never easy for us to surrender our timeframes and simply wait and trust.

I wonder if this is even more difficult in our society today where most of us no longer have to wait for months for fruit, vegetables etc to grow, or livestock to get big enough to eat. And if we want something other than food, we no longer even need to save up for it, instead we can buy it today on credit. In our physical world we live in a day of instant supply and convenience and I wonder if that tempts us to expect the same in spiritual things? Take communication for example, whereas just twenty years ago it was considered fast to get a letter within a week from the other side of the world, now we expect instant communication over the Internet; if an email takes an hour to be delivered, we complain!

Often we are simply in need of learning to wait on God and to know Christ as our Patience, Faith and Endurance. John in Revelation spoke of himself as our brother in the tribulation, kingdom and *patience* of Jesus Christ. We may know about the kingdom and tribulation of Christ and yet lack the experience and heart knowledge of the patience of Christ. James wrote that temptation accomplishes patience and endurance in us (James 1:2). While some more modern translations say "trials" or "testing", the original Greek word means temptation. This is hard for us to understand, it isn't in us to "consider it all joy" when we are surrounded by temptation! It truly is a trial which is designed to bring us to the end of ourselves and into Christ as our Faith, Endurance and Patience!

This patience and trust is not passive at all; it is very active, even if it may not look like it. We can be sorely tempted to be moved from our heavenly Place of Rest, back to an earthly place of unrest and turmoil. There can be a battle just to remain in Rest and Peace! It is not being selfish or lazy but is co-operating with Him and His work - giving up all self-effort and yielding ourselves to God's activity - and that can be very hard work!

The other side of this is that it can be just as hard for us to do what Father wishes when we don't feel either capable or ready for it. And whenever we don't understand Father's ways with us, or when we feel attacked or misunderstood by others, there is the very real temptation to just give up instead of giving out, to be depressed instead of pressing on.

Self

Whether we hang back because of fear and self-deprecation or go ahead and do something because of pride and self-sufficiency, the source of the action or inaction is still Self and not the Spirit of God. Depending upon what our natural temperament and inclination is, we can be tempted by pride to step out ahead of time, or be paralyzed by fear and do nothing. Our enemy is not always so concerned about tempting us to do obvious sinful things, but simply to get US to make decisions independent of Christ and from Self instead of from Christ's Life - whether that means doing something or not doing something. It all boils down to trusting ourselves more than we trust God and listening to Self rather than Him - being motivated by either fear or pride rather than trusting God. At the root of all temptation is an appeal to Self and we are tempted not only by

external things, but by the internal: tempted to listen to ourselves and our judgments, tempted to put ourselves and whatever pertains to us before all else.

I wonder how we would respond if we were stuck in a desert starving and the thought came to mind that because you are a child of God to tell a stone to turn into a loaf of bread, because the Bible says, "My God shall supply all your needs". Or wanting to prove to others that God would protect you even if you did something dangerous. Or claiming a city for God because "whatsoever you ask I will do"? If this sounds familiar, it is because that is exactly how Jesus was tempted.

He was tempted to make decisions Himself and make things happen Himself; to rely on *His own* ability and sufficiency even for legitimate and necessary things, but OUTSIDE of God's timing and way. He was offered all power and authority, which was absolutely His right to claim; He was tempted to prove Who He was, and to provide for His very real needs. All three temptations were aimed at Self - Self-motivation, Self-preservation, Self-recognition, Self-pity, Self-achievement, Self-sufficiency etc. He was tempted to use His God-given gifts and authority Himself and to have something NOW rather than be patient and wait for God's time and way. If He Who knew no sin was tempted in this way, how can we expect anything different??? He was tempted to take those things which were His by right and were God's will for Him to have; but He had given up everything, including His rights, and was not governed by Self.

Spiritual temptation is very subtle and deceptive because what we are tempted to do can appear on the surface to be right, and all for God, but God's will must be done in God's way and in God's time. Jesus was tempted just as we are tempted, but whereas the enemy tempts us in order to make us fall, our Father allows testing so that we can rise up; to prove to us that He can cause us to overcome the temptation, just as Jesus did.

"Now the Lord does not tempt us with the intent of making us stumble. That is the way the adversary works. No, the Lord indeed tests us and proves us, but His Way is to strengthen us in the testing, whereas the devil wants to weaken us in the testing. It has been said that our circumstances will either leave us better or they

will leave us bitter. Ultimately, the decision is ours. We should steadfastly resist the temptation of satan, but we should also learn to distinguish between the assault of the enemy and the proving of the Lord. Jesus already knows what He is going to do. In His mind it is as good as done. But He waits, and He proves us. Not because He does not know us, but because we do not know ourselves." (*Chip Brogden*)

We truly need an unveiling not only of Christ, but also of ourselves and our mindsets and motivations. The more of Christ and His Life we come to know, the more imperative it is that we depend upon Him moment by moment; otherwise we can be tempted to rely on what we know and misuse the ability and knowledge we have been given. To whom much is given, much is required - not necessarily much doing required, but much listening and responding to what we hear from our Father. If anyone could rely on themselves and decide independently what to do themselves, then surely it was Jesus Christ; but He said He did *nothing* from Himself, He would not act apart from His Father (John 5:19,30; 8:28). Jesus would not take any of the credit, glory or honour for Himself (John 8:50,54). He truly was a crucified man before He was even crucified. During His temptation in the wilderness Jesus was tempted to do God's will Himself rather than be surrendered. He overcame because He was not influenced by what He was genuinely entitled to or by seemingly important and legitimate needs and desires - both natural and spiritual.

"Satan will absorb and obsess with the material and temporal in order to rob of the spiritual or to squeeze it out... What we have and can get *NOW* is the main consideration. This life is everything! This is the real; the eternal is unreal to the natural man. This is a great point on which Satan tempted Christ and offered Him the world. On this point Jesus overcame the world! In the world the *SEEN* is what matters; the natural senses of perception and evaluation wholly govern. The standard of success is that of what can be shown... One of the greatest features in Christian spiritual education is that of learning how altogether different are God's thoughts, standards of values and ways from our own." (*T. Austin-Sparks* - <http://www.austin-sparks.net/english/books/000709.html>)

Who, What, When and How

Even the friends of Jesus when He was on earth were constantly surprised and offended by the who, what, when and how of what He did and didn't do and it is still the same today! It can be difficult for us to look beyond ourselves and how we feel and to focus only on Christ. Sometimes we have to ignore what our physical senses tell us and do whatever we have been led to, knowing that Father will enable, provide and be all we need. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God" - we can absolutely trust His sufficiency and distrust our own! He maintains and supplies for all that He creates, and in the same way we are left to supply for what we create from ourselves when we go our own independent way! HIS work is just that: His, and not ours, although we are all part of His work whether we are doing something obvious or not, because we are part of Him!

Jesus Christ is doing His work in many ways. He creates the immaculate connections with one another that He requires to do His work, He always provides fully for what is His; again, how can He not? He takes good care of His body! Every part of our human body gets used every day and it all works together beautifully and we think nothing of it! Parts of our body, like our hands, are designed to be exact opposites of each other and yet our two hands working together accomplish what one hand on its own cannot. Some functions of the body are unseen and not even thought of but are part of everything the body does; obviously wherever the Head goes, there goes the Body... This is such a powerful picture of the Body of Christ: we all function and live because of Him and His Life!

This picture of unity in the one body is the relationship and intimacy which God has always desired to have with us: for us to trust Him and be His completely... without us needing to know all the answers and be like God. Our enemy still seeks to tempt and deceive us in the same way that he tempted Jesus and also Adam and Eve in the garden: by trying to get us to act and do something from our Self. We, like they, are tempted to think God is holding us back: "Did God really say not to eat from that tree? Do it! You won't die, you'll be like God and see the real picture".

Adam and Eve's failure was not firstly in what they did, but in what they

didn't do: they didn't trust God even though they knew Him personally.

We, just like Adam and Eve, find it hard to trust and embrace God and His Love for each of us. If they had truly trusted their Father, they would not have believed what the enemy said, nor would they have been afraid of God and hid when He went looking for them. They would have known that He would not reject them because of what they'd done. He loved them and went searching for them! He wasn't separating Himself from them, THEY hid from Him! He searched them out and covered their shame, He clothed them. I have often wondered if He used sheepskins to clothe them, symbolizing the Lamb of God Who through His death is now our covering. Yet, in spite of the great All that He has done, so many of us still live in fear, still listen to the enemy, still eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil instead of the tree of Life, still hide in shame, still try to cover ourselves with leaves which quickly wither instead of simply trusting our Father, knowing Christ as our Covering, being in Love, and eating the fruit of Life!

This applies to us in so many ways... there is the temptation to act apart from the Life of Christ with seemingly spiritual things which WE originate or even genuinely God-initiated things which we then take hold of and take on as our own. There is the temptation of self-preservation and "safety" by not doing or saying anything which might upset the status quo. There is the temptation of being like God in thinking that WE know what is right or wrong for either ourselves or for somebody else. If we can trust our own judgments and actions then we do not need God; we can rely upon our own "knowledge" and be quite proud of being "right". But whatever has no need of Christ and His Life, is really death.

Anything which is of eternal consequence will result only if and only when it has been brought about by God Himself! If that were not the case then WE would be in control and not God. The battle and temptation within us is to know and accept that we must decrease and He must increase and to be surrendered to Him as Lord; to lose sight of ourselves and see only Christ. Knowing Christ as our Life and Source of all and depending on Him gives us correct and God-given knowledge and understanding. Knowing that we cannot trust ourselves but can trust Him, keeps us humble and dependent upon Him and enables us to simply discern between Life or death rather than a thousand "many things"!

Knowing and discerning good and evil is important and necessary too but the source of that knowledge must not be natural but supernatural; not from us, but from Christ and His Life which we recognize within us. This is part of maturing and knowing His Voice and His Life: discerning between what is earthly (from me) and what is heavenly (from God).

Obviously that doesn't happen overnight! I don't think our mistakes and failures surprise our Father though, He loves us so completely and utterly, He searches us out when we mess things up and want to hide, and He provides for us in Christ. This is a journey in which we are learning to increasingly trust Him, it is a process... we still make mistakes and do the wrong thing from time to time, but we are learning more and more what it means to live in Christ! We are learning not only to know His Voice, but to also trust Him with ourselves and with each other. We are learning to let go of our fears and hangups which bind and limit us and to take hold of Christ and live in Love and Freedom. We are learning that there is NO fear in Love. We are learning not to give in to Self and temptation, but to overcome in Christ. We are learning that in Him we truly live and move and have our being. We are learning that Christ truly is All!

The God who made the world and everything in it, this Master of sky and land, doesn't live in custom-made shrines or need the human race to run errands for him, as if he couldn't take care of himself. He makes the creatures; the creatures don't make him. Starting from scratch, he made the entire human race and made the earth hospitable, with plenty of time and space for living so we could seek after God, and not just grope around in the dark but actually find him. He doesn't play hide-and-seek with us. He's not remote; he's near. We live and move in him, can't get away from him! One of your poets said it well: 'We're the God-created.' (Acts 17:24-28 TM)



God's Will... But not as we've known it

God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him. Phil. 2:13

On this journey out of religion and into Christ, Father has often challenged the words I use and either redefined, or dispensed with them altogether. In this instance, He challenged my understanding of His "will". I realised that "God's will" and "the will of God" were religious phrases that I needed to examine. I find that most religious terms are used without understanding what they mean in real life. That is the nature of religion: the mouth speaks what the head is full of, but truth and reality are not heard or experienced in the heart.

Christians often refer to the will of God and God's will, and yet the word "will" is *not used in this way* with anybody else! For instance, you wouldn't say, "It was Lynette's will that I go with her" or "It was the will of Lynette for me to go". We just don't use the English word "will" like that, but the Bible does, because *that was how the word was used 500 years ago* when the Scriptures were first translated into English. But interestingly, 500 years ago the word "will" did not mean what it means now!

When you look at the Greek root of this word translated as "will", you find that it means to want, wish, or desire. The meaning in Hebrew is similar: "to delight in, take pleasure in, desire, be pleased with". This challenges our understanding of what God's "will" means, because when we think of doing what He *wants*, that requires a close relationship and knowing His *heart*. The English translators of the day used the old English word "will" (from "willan") because this word "will" used to mean: "to wish, desire, or want". However, today the word "will" *no longer means that at all*. The word "will" today is defined as:

The capability of conscious choice and decision and intention, a fixed and persistent intent or purpose.

The mental faculty by which one deliberately chooses or decides upon a course of action.

Diligent purposefulness; determination.

Resolution, compulsion, ability and even inevitability.

And so, when we think of "God's will", we tend to think of resolution, inevitability and a deliberate course of action - but that is *not* what the word meant in the original language that the Scripture was written in. Although the Greek word meant "what God wants or desires", when the Bible was first translated into English the word "want" wasn't used as we use it today ("want" meant to be lacking something), so the word "want" as we know it today is not found in old versions of the Bible; they used this word "will" instead which meant (to them back then): to wish or desire.

Obviously there are correct uses of the word and every time you see "will" in the Bible it doesn't mean "want"; I'm referring to two specific Greek words: *thelo* and *thelema* (the prolonged form of *thelo*). It seems that these two words were intended to mean "want" or "wish", and many modern translations recognise this and now read quite differently as a result. Out of 207 occurrences in the NASB, *thelo* is translated 78 times as want, wants, etc, 51 times as wish, wished etc, 24 times as desire, desiring etc, and 25 times as will, willing etc. They are not "watering down the Word", they are clarifying the *meaning* so that we understand what was originally intended. For instance, here is just a very small sampling from various versions, and I have highlighted in italics where the word "will" used to be:

"My delight is to do Your *pleasure*, O my God" (Psalm 40:8 BBE).

"Let Your *pleasure* be done, as in heaven, so on earth" (Matt. 6:10 GWT).

"Whoever does what My Father in heaven *wants* is My brother and sister and mother" (Matt. 12:50 GWT).

"Father, if it is your *pleasure*, take this cup from Me: but still, let Your *pleasure*, not Mine, be done" (Luke 22:42 BBE).

"My judgments are right because I don't try to do what I *want* but what the One who sent Me *wants*" (John 5:30 GWT).

"Father, I *desire* that they also, whom You have given Me, may be with Me where I am" (John 17:24 NASB).

"I have found David son of Jesse a man after My own heart; he will do everything I *want* him to do" (Acts 13:22 NIV).

"It is God who is producing in you both the desire and the ability to do what *pleases* Him" (Phil. 2:13 ISV).

"What you ought to say is, 'If the Lord *wants* us to, we will live and do this or that.'" (James 4:15 NLT).

"The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles *want* to do..." (1 Pet. 4:3 ESV).

There is another Greek word that is only occasionally translated as "willing" and that is the word "boulamai". This Greek word means to intend, to be willing, to wish, desire, have a purpose – but is stronger than *thelo*. Its use in Greek shows that it means to *really* intend - it is something that you strongly desire and intend or want to do. It is not an imperative "this *shall* be done". This word "boulamai" is used in 2 Peter 3:9: "He is long-suffering (extraordinarily patient) toward you, not *desiring* that any should perish, but that all should turn to repentance". That was from the Amplified Version, the KJV in old English reads that He "is longsuffering to us-ward, not *willing* that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." And so it is not surprising that there is some confusion related to this word "will" today.

Often the old English use of "will" confuses and veils the original meaning: "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what *will* I, if it be already kindled?" In the NIV this now reads: "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I *wish* it were already kindled!" That we can understand, He was *wanting* the fire of the Holy Spirit to be released on the earth, but saying "what will I" doesn't even make sense to us now! Another example is 1 Tim. 2:4 "[God] Who *will* have all men to be saved". That is again old English, as most modern versions now make clear: "Who *desires* all people to be saved" (ESV); "Who *wishes* all men to be saved" (Amplified Bible). God *wants* all to be saved, and there were at least three other words in the Greek which meant an imperative, inevitable "shall be" that Paul could have used instead, if that was what he had meant.

This begs the question: does it matter, does God get what He wants anyway? There is no doubt that His plan and purpose in Christ *will be fulfilled* no matter what, and *nothing* can stand in the way of that. The Bible reveals to us that God can do anything He wants and have anything He wants, and yet we also see that He *doesn't always exercise that power over mankind*. He can have what He wants and yet He doesn't always get what He wants on this earth; and that reveals an awful lot about His heart, character, and love... He doesn't force Himself or what He wants on mankind. God is not limited by anyone or anything except Himself.

From the garden of Eden to today, He has always wanted a *close relationship* with us; He wants us to *want* Him, *love* Him and *choose* Him. And that elevates

Him far above us humans, we cannot comprehend that because if that was any one of us, we would ensure that we got exactly what we wanted; if we were God we would just "make it so". We're that selfish and self-centered.

As humans we try to get what we want by controlling and manipulating people; whether through our words, our silence, or our actions. Our enemy tries to control and manipulate us through fear. BUT GOD... even though He is God and could control us, instead He loves and hopes... hopes for a response... waits for a response... longs for a response... and loves us regardless of our response. He is always after the heart and choosing is a matter for each individual's heart.

When I finally submit to Him and His love has conquered me, then what He wants becomes what I also want. It brings my heart and my actions into line with what He desires; so much so that I no longer even want what I want, instead I want what *He* wants. You always want to know and do what your Loved One wants, simply because you love them. When we understand God's "will" to be what God desires, it encourages us to spend time with Him learning to *know* His heart, so that we can give Him His deepest heart's desire.

When Father first showed me this, it changed my heart and my praying. It is difficult to describe, but I think He created an even deeper union of heart and purpose within me. Instead of saying "Your will be done," I began to say, "I want what *You* want done"; we both want it, we both desire it, we are one in heart and that is something very precious. We are not only one in our desire, but one in *working together* toward the fulfillment of that desire.

Our Calling

God's "will" is often thought of in terms of His "will" for your life, or what your "calling" is. Another word for calling is vocation, which is from "vocal"; meaning what you are "called" to. That is significant when you consider that in the Bible we are those who are called out! Our "calling" is to hear the Voice and be called *out*; out of this world, out of religion, out of Self, out of all substitutes for Christ... and called *into* Christ (for more on this read "Being Called"). And we're not called out of the world and into Christ for a *vacation*, but for a *vocation*. In reaction to the 'doing good works' and busyness that religion endorses, we may come to the conclusion that we're here for a vacation instead of finding our vocation. When we have seen the error of a religion of works, it is natural to go to the opposite extreme and conclude that we shouldn't do a single

thing.

A vacation may be absolutely necessary after all the busyness of religious works (ie we need to "vacate" it all), but no vacation is ever meant to be permanent. Many seem to stay on vacation and don't go on to discover Christ as their *Vocation* and Life. We've seen the church, religion and 'good works' for what they really are, and we've been called out of all that and called into Christ; but then the question becomes: *so where do we go from here?* Is "coming out" all there is to it? What do we do with this Treasure we have received? Does Christ and His Purpose become our vocation and occupation or are we still camped out somewhere on vacation?

Even though Christ is our Rest, this Rest is never passive and vacant, but is occupied and active! With God it seems that there is no such thing as 'vacancy' or emptiness; He is always about filling - filling us, filling the earth, filling all things, going forth, movement - fulfilling His Purpose. As His children we are no different! Life is activity; death is inactivity. We ARE to be dead and passive to our Self, but *alive* and active to Christ!

I'm not for one minute endorsing busying ourselves with doing things for God again; I thank God that we have been delivered from that bondage and we now know the freedom of Christ as our Rest (as I have written about in "Observing the Sabbath, but not as we've known it"). *We cannot experience either the Rest or the Work of Christ unless we are first living by the Life of Christ.* We all know how to work from our own life and do what we want to do; that comes naturally to us. What isn't so easy is learning to rest from THAT work, and instead be activated in the Work of Christ.

My husband's career is in education and even when he is not at work his vocation is still part of who he is. And it is exactly the same with us when God Himself is our "vocation". It is not so much about what we do or don't do, but about who we *are* by simply being one with Him and being united in vision and purpose. He is our Career in the sense of being our occupation, pursuit, motivation, profession, and life's work; not what we do FOR Him, but who we are and what we do BECAUSE of Him, by His Life in us.

Everything in creation that is living, is active and producing something. Everybody, whether they think they are working or not, has a primary identity, occupation and resulting production. Our work is linked very strongly with our

identification and occupation. So what do we identify with, what are we occupied with, and what do we produce as a consequence? Is *Christ* being produced in my life? Have I found identity in Him? Is He my occupation? Is He increasing and producing Life through me, not by me trying to make that happen, but simply by His Life in me growing and reproducing Himself? It is not about what *we* do, but about what *God* is doing; often in spite of us! Our identity is not in what we do, or in our work; even our work done with Christ; our identity is simply: Him.

Our Work

So what is "God's will", what is God's desire? He wants to see His Son filling us, and to that end, to see us deny ourselves by taking up our cross daily (Luke 9:23), being united with Christ (John 17), being His representatives on this earth (Acts 1:8), and *knowing* Him in the fullest sense of the word (1 John 5:20). And the more we know Him, the more we intuitively know and are governed and directed by what He wants, because we know His heart.

God searches for those who are after His own heart; and just think about God's heart and how totally committed He is to us. To the extent of giving up His Son. To the extent of death. When He sees these characteristics in His own children's hearts: totally committed, giving up what they love (themselves and their own life), willing to do whatever it takes, happy to endure whatever is necessary, then He commits Himself to that person in a way in which He wouldn't otherwise do. And that commitment results in Him revealing Himself to that person in a deeper way, revealing His heart and what He wants....

Every person I know who has gone further and deeper with God, has this intensity, determination, devotion and passion about them; what some would call an "utterness" for God. They are passionate because their heart is God's, and His heart is theirs. It is a sold-out wholehearted willingness to do *whatever* their Loved One wants, no matter what the cost. Even if God kills them, they will still trust and hope in Him (Job 13:15), they do not cling to their lives even in the face of death (Rev. 12:11).

Paul is one whose life and words were characterised by this intensity: "We tell others about Christ, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all the wisdom God has given us. We want to present them to God, perfect in their relationship to Christ. That's why I work and struggle so hard, depending on

Christ's mighty power that works within me. I want you to know how much I have agonized for you..." (Col. 1:28-2:1). Relationships that are important to us we will work at and even agonize over; our commitment and devotion to the person means that we are prepared to overlook what we don't understand, spend time with them, and work together; and our relationship with God is no exception.

Most of us, when presented with a choice, will take the option that is the easiest and requires the least amount of our effort, energy, and time. We want things to just happen without us having to do too much, but when it comes to the things of God, there has to be activity and not passivity. There has to be *total devotion*, and there is a price to be paid: giving up yourself, denying what you want, and doing what God wants.

Many seem to think that everything God gives is unconditional. I challenge you to do a search in the Bible for the number of times where the word "if" is used in a conditional way! Christ has done *all* that is necessary, and we cannot earn anything; He is our Rest, we have died with Him and also been raised with Him; but this new Life, *Christ's Life* in us, is always *active and at work* and we need to learn to co-operate with Him. Fellowship means partnership, and this partnership is His Life working in and through me. It is not a case of me working FOR Him, but working in/with Him. That is a very big difference. The source and motivation of each are worlds apart. And only what is done *by* Him and *through* Him is of any spiritual value.

Ministry is not about what we do for God, true ministry is what HE does through us. There are many "ministries" that are not the work of God at all because they are neither ministering to Christ, nor ministering from Christ. It must be all about Him, not us. Our only ministry is to minister to Him - serving Him by waiting on Him to fulfill His desires. All other true ministry is not really *ours* at all, but *His*: it is Him administering *His Life* through us to others and therefore it is *His* ministry and we can claim no ownership of it. He alone is the Minister and the Ministry.

I don't think any of us would deny that the physical life of Jesus on this earth was exemplary. He was in constant communication as to where, when and what His Father wanted done or said. He made it very clear that in Himself He could do nothing, and yet through God, He could do anything! He gave up everything He was, He didn't care whether people accepted or rejected Him. He said and did

what His Father wanted Him to regardless of the consequences and misunderstandings, because His heart and His life belonged to His Father. "While Jesus was here on earth, He offered prayers and pleadings, with a loud cry and tears, to the One who could rescue Him from death. And God heard His prayers because of His deep reverence for God. Even though Jesus was God's Son, *He learned obedience from the things He suffered*" (Heb. 5:7,8) and His brothers and sisters still learn obedience (doing what God wants) in the same way.

Are we learning obedience through suffering? Are we not only willing to pay the price, but *wanting* to? Jesus goes on to say, "To the one who conquers I will give a place to sit with Me on My throne, just as I have conquered and have sat down with My Father on His throne". You normally conquer and overcome your enemy through a fight, and this battle is against the apathy and self-satisfaction that we are so easily lulled into. The biggest enemy we have to conquer is Self. We may think we are in a very good place spiritually, when in reality we are poor, blind and naked.

Even to those who are saved (because salvation is a gift and cannot be earned through works) Jesus says, "I advise you: *Buy* gold purified in fire from Me so that you may be rich. *Buy* white clothes from Me. Wear them so that you may keep your shameful, naked body from showing. *Buy* ointment to put on your eyes so that you may see. I correct and discipline everyone I love. Take this seriously, and change the way you think and act" (Rev. 3:18,19).

He tells us to *buy* from Him... that means there is a PRICE to be paid. Most want someone else to pay the price and freely give them the gold. But the clothes and the ointment are personal; no one else can wear clothes for you, or see for you. Only YOU can repent, changing the way you think and act; nobody else can do that for you. Only YOU can be earnest and really mean business with God. But it all seems to begin with "BUY... from Me". And we all know that in order to have money to buy anything, work is necessary; we have to give up something that is precious to us: our time, energy and effort, and sometimes even what we thought was right.

It is so easy for us to settle down where we are comfortable and camp out with the last thing that God showed us instead of going outside the camp and continuing to journey on, even if it means being alone, without the camp (Heb. 13:13). Sometimes that is the price that must be paid. Whatever the cost,

knowing Him, knowing what He wants, and knowing His heart is the ultimate reward! May He create in us a heart that is so united with His own that we say from the heart, "*Father, I want what You want done on earth, just as it is in heaven.*"

Jesus told them, "My food is to do what the One who sent Me wants Me to do and to finish the work He has given Me. John 4:34



Knowledge... but not as we've known it

Solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Heb. 5:14

Most of us know that in the Garden of Eden there were two trees: the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil. And because we know that the Tree of Life is good and represents God's Son, we usually conclude that the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil is bad. Being prompted to go deeper and find out more about this, I discovered that knowledge is very rarely spoken of in negative terms in the Scriptures. God said, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6) and we are told to value and search for it (Prov. 2:1-6). The Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil is not mentioned again after Genesis, so I went back to look at the beginning....

We are told that everything that God made and placed in that garden was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Presumably that included the Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil because the Bible does not state otherwise, instead it says, "And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground; trees that were pleasing to the eye *and good for food*. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." That challenged my understanding, as I had always thought of this tree as being "evil", because I thought it represented *my knowledge* of good and evil.

However, instead of saying that the Tree of Knowledge represented our knowledge, the Bible seems to suggest that it represented *God's knowledge* of good and evil. He said, "The man has now become *like one of us, knowing good and evil*," and even the enemy said, "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and *you will be like God, knowing good and evil*". Doesn't that sound as though this knowledge was *God's*, that this was HIS knowledge rather than our own?

The fact of the matter is that relying on our own understanding and knowledge is simply *our nature*; we don't have to *eat* that fruit, we simply ARE it! Without even thinking, we accept our own knowledge of good and evil all the time. But this Tree is not about MY knowledge, I wasn't in the Garden of Eden, but God was. It represents HIS Knowledge.

The Tree of Knowledge

Some people have taken out the word "knowledge" and think of this Tree as being the "tree of good and evil". But this is the Tree of the *Knowledge* of good and evil. That word for "knowledge" in the Hebrew means perception, discernment, understanding, *wisdom* - Christ Jesus has become for us Wisdom from God (1 Cor. 1:30), "Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3). My knowledge must now come from a new source: Christ as the Tree of Knowledge! This Knowledge is not a thing that can be apprehended mentally, this Knowledge is a *Person* who is KNOWN, just as the Tree of Life is a Person we live through. The knowledge/perception that comes from knowing what is good or bad is something personal and something that cannot be given to another.

This begs the question of why God prohibited Adam and Eve from eating from this Tree in the first place. Why did He tell Adam that he would die (spiritually) on the day that he ate that fruit? Perhaps because he would have been accessing the Knowledge of God *without having first eaten/assimilated His Life*, therefore it would bring death. What is another term for knowing what is right and wrong, good and evil? *The Law*! This explains why eating that fruit brought death, "since through the law comes knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). It also explains why God then gave the Law; it had all become legal instead of relational, they had chosen the Law over Life. And so Christ came to fulfill the Law and bring Life. Knowledge *without Life*, even a perfect knowledge of what is right and wrong, brings death; just written words (head knowledge, the law) kills, but the Spirit brings Life (2 Cor. 3:6).

It may also have been an issue of timing; God may have wanted Adam to choose to eat from the Tree of Life before sharing with him His Knowledge/Discernment of good and evil. You cannot know God intimately until you first have His Life in you, until you have been birthed

into His Family. You can't have any real knowledge of what your Father likes and dislikes and considers to be good or evil, unless you have been born as His child and live with Him!

Neither the Law, nor the Tree of Knowledge, were the problem in the Garden of Eden; the problem was in man and still is... "The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh." (Rom. 7:12-14). Over and over in the Bible we are told that the Law (the instruction) of God is good, holy, and right, "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul." (Psalm 19:7). Today we seem to have lost sight of this. Jesus said that He did not come to do away with the Law, but to perfectly fulfill it (Matt. 5:17).

Our Father in His wisdom does not trust just anyone with His Knowledge and revelation; too many would serve themselves with it. Instead, knowledge and revelation are linked with intimate relationship in Life; the deeper the relationship, the deeper the revelation and knowledge. Jesus loved His disciples, yet He revealed more of Himself and His heart to those who knew Him intimately. Only three were close to Him, with only one being the closest.... It was all about relationship then, and still is now. Even in our human relationships we do not reveal much of who we are to people we don't know very well; the fullest revelation and knowledge is reserved for those we know and trust. And because of our respect and love in the relationship, we do not reveal all that we know to others (2 Cor. 12:1-4).

The Offence

In the Garden of Eden it was not the Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil that was the problem; it was the fact that Adam and Eve *didn't believe or trust God*. Their unbelief and distrust was an offence and violation in God's eyes and caused the break in their relationship with Him.

Most of us are very good at blame shifting: Adam blamed God, Eve

blamed the enemy, and today we blame the Tree of Knowledge and vilify it and think it was the problem instead of *us* being the problem! The fact is that Adam and Eve chose to trust *themselves* and their own knowledge and judgment before they ever took one bite of that fruit. Their suspicions had been aroused, "Did God really say...?" They no longer believed or trusted God. If they had trusted God instead of themselves, they would never have done what He had told them not to do.

I see myself right there. We make our own judgments based on our knowledge all the time, and they are usually wrong. So often I trust in what I see and think I know is right or wrong (my knowledge) instead of searching and asking God for His Knowledge and then believing what He shows me. This was the big issue for the Israelites in the wilderness, their unbelief prevented them from entering into the Promised Land of Rest (symbolising Christ): "We see that *because of their unbelief* they were not able to enter His rest" (Heb. 3:16). Just as the Israelites died in the wilderness, so Adam and Eve were sent from the garden and from His Rest to a comparative wilderness where they would have to work and labour until they too died. Because of their unbelief they were not allowed to eat from the Tree of Life.

The issue of trust and belief is important in any relationship, and clearly God values it: "I want to remind you that the Lord at one time delivered His people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe" (Jude 1:5). This belief is not merely mental assent of something you believe to be true, but the kind of belief *in your heart* that makes you trust and have faith no matter what. When you think about it, not trusting God makes NO sense at all! HE is in control of this universe; He created us, loves us, and knows us! So why on earth do we not trust Him? Simply because each of us grows up believing a lie: that we can trust ourselves and our knowledge, and that we know what is best for ourselves. We basically believe that we are God - the lie that was introduced in the Garden of Eden. It is only when God Himself shatters this illusion that we can begin to see rays of Truth bursting through: He is in control, I am not. He can change things, I cannot. He knows what is best, I do not. My knowledge is totally redundant.

The Two Trees

So there were two trees in the garden, and those two trees go together, it is a Law of Life! When we eat the fruit of the Tree of Life (Christ), we also need to eat from God's Tree of Knowledge of good and evil, because if we go by our own knowledge of good and evil, we just get it wrong all the time. Not only is it impossible for us to keep the laws of God, it is also impossible for us to know what is good and what is evil unless we have Christ's Life and Knowledge. There are many instances in the Bible where God broke His own laws, the prime example being Jesus Himself breaking the Sabbath and many other laws, because HIS Knowledge, and His Law is perfect and transcends our understanding of it! And I am not thinking of the Law as commands or rules that must be obeyed, I am thinking of God's Perfect Law as summed up and fulfilled in Christ (Matt. 5:17,18) Who has given us a new "law", the Law of Life, Love and Liberty! "Christ has already accomplished the purpose for which the law was given. As a result, all who *believe in Him* are made right with God." (Rom. 10:4). It is about belief, trust and faith in the heart, and not about what we do or don't do according to external laws and rules. This Knowledge is not about knowing and following the rules in your head, but knowing and following the Man in your heart!

Accepting and eating God's Knowledge of good and evil is vital, because in and of ourselves, we don't have a clue. Yet many treat this Tree of Knowledge with disdain saying, "don't judge, don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil". But if you don't accept God's Knowledge of good and evil, then you will either rely on your own incorrect knowledge, or compromise and accept anything and everything. The very nature of God - which is holiness - separates, sets apart, distinguishes and judges between what He knows is good or evil.

Often judging and discerning are put in the "too hard basket" because we have to seek Wisdom and rely on the Spirit of Life and the Spirit of the Knowledge of God in order to discern and judge correctly. If you just say "you must not judge" that makes it so much easier, but that is *going back to using a law instead of depending on Life!* The law becomes "you must not judge" instead of spending time asking Christ for *His Knowledge* and discernment in each situation. People often use the plank in the eye example for not judging, but seem to miss the fact that Jesus went on to say, "*first* get the beam of timber out of your own eye, *and then* you will see clearly to take the tiny particle out of your brother's eye". He wasn't

saying don't judge at all, but *deal with yourself first*, and then you will be able to judge/see clearly and help your friend.

Due to this mindset that the knowledge of good and evil is bad, many just reject knowledge altogether and so reject judging and discerning. Consequently, today there is an awful mixture of good and evil, truth and error, and a lack of knowledge and discernment. God's people are destroyed just as Hosea prophesied (Hos. 4:6) and as Isaiah also prophesied: "My people have gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge."

Light to See

We desperately need the Life and Knowledge of God summed up in His Son Jesus Christ. After Father had shown me these things, He then brought me across these words written many years ago by T. Austin-Sparks which I found very encouraging (*italics are mine*):

"Who can fail to see that this garden is a type of Christ! Is He not the tree of life? Is He not the river of life? *Is He not the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Is not such knowledge in a secret way bound up with Him, to the end that through Him it should be known?* Are not the deepest secrets of God concerning good and evil bound up in the mystery of the person of Christ? He is the fruit. He is the health. He is the nourishment. In a word, He is the sum of the knowledge of the glory of God. Christ is set forth in type by that garden....

"God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, planted a tree of life, open to man, and *a tree of light (the tree of the knowledge of good and evil)* which, while man was under probation, was kept from him, under a prohibition. It is well to remember that true light only comes along the line of the obedience of faith. It was not that God was withholding essential knowledge from man, but was testing him as to his faith in Himself, and as to his obedience of faith.... The knowledge must be living, must be linked with life. You can eat of the 'tree of knowledge' - I mean that other tree of knowledge, the knowledge of the Lord, of heavenly things - but even so, you must have the "tree of life" to keep the balance. Knowledge

and life correspond, go together." (*From Spiritual Ministry, Chapter 2*).

I was very interested that he referred to the Tree of Knowledge as the Tree of Light, "The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Psalm 19:8). God's Knowledge gives insight and enables us to see what we could not see before. I am not thinking for one moment of head knowledge or "knowledge" that we accumulate from others. That is man's knowledge, not God's Knowledge. I am talking about first hand experiential knowledge, the full, correct knowledge (epignosis) of Christ that changes you from the inside out because it is the knowledge, perception and insight that comes from intimate relationship! This Knowledge enables you to say, "I have SEEN!" It is the eyes of our hearts being enlightened (2 Cor. 4:6, Eph. 1:18).

It is only when we have seen something for ourselves that we then have real knowledge that can be recounted to others. You cannot describe the breathtaking awe of Niagara Falls until you yourself have stood within two feet of that enormous volume of water cascading over the edge. And even after recounting what you have seen for yourself, you cannot make another see it unless they too go and see for themselves. *Then* they will know... because they too have seen! Seeing is something intensely personal, just as knowledge is. I can tell you what I have seen and know of Christ, but that cannot compare with the delight and depth of knowledge you experience when you too see, hear and know Him for yourself. May each of us see and know for ourselves how beyond words and beyond our knowledge Christ Jesus is!

This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. Phil. 1:9-11



Parables... but not as we've known them

"...Without a parable He said nothing to them. This was in fulfillment of what was spoken by the prophet: I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things that have been hidden since the foundation of the world." *Matthew 13:34b-35*

Many of us, instead of being like little children and asking our Father what the parables in the Bible mean, have instead heard and accepted what others have told us they mean. Parabolic, symbolic language is not always easy to understand, yet Jesus deliberately spoke in parables so that KNOWING our Father personally and intimately would be the key to all revelation and understanding.

The disciples came up and asked, "Why do you tell stories?" He replied, "You've been given insight into God's kingdom. You know how it works. Not everybody has this gift, this insight; it hasn't been given to them. Whenever someone has a ready heart for this, the insights and understandings flow freely. But if there is no readiness, any trace of receptivity soon disappears. That's why I tell stories: to create readiness, to nudge the people toward receptive insight. In their present state they can stare till doomsday and not see it, listen till they're blue in the face and not get it. I don't want Isaiah's forecast repeated all over again:

Your ears are open but you don't hear a thing.

Your eyes are awake but you don't see a thing.

The people are blockheads!

They stick their fingers in their ears

so they won't have to listen;

They screw their eyes shut

so they won't have to look,

so they won't have to deal with me face-to-face

and let me heal them.

"But you have God-blessed eyes—eyes that see! And God-blessed ears

—ears that hear! A lot of people, prophets and humble believers among them, would have given anything to see what you are seeing, to hear what you are hearing, but never had the chance. (Matt. 13:10-17 TM).

The Parable of the Friend at Midnight

Part of our unlearning is in this area of the parables and stories that Jesus gave because often these stories have been interpreted through the mindset of religion rather than through Christ teaching us Himself. One example of this occurs in Luke, immediately after the Lord's prayer. Jesus said *"Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and will say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves of bread. For a friend of mine who is on a journey has just come, and I have nothing to put before him. And he from within will answer, Do not disturb me, the door is now closed, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and supply you with anything? I tell you, although he will not get up and supply him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his shameless persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. So I say to you, Ask and keep on asking and it shall be given to you; seek and keep on seeking and you shall find; knock and keep on knocking and the door shall be opened to you."* Luke 11:6-9.

In this parable, God is represented as being the friend in the house who gives the Bread - so who represents us in this parable? Where are WE in this picture?

Most of us have been told to see ourselves as being the friend without bread who kept asking for bread and we learn that we are to be persistent in prayer - to ask and keep asking so that we will eventually receive because of our persistence. But perhaps there may be more to this picture because there were more people involved in this parable than just the two men. Are we normally referred to in the Scriptures as God's friend or as His children? We are His CHILDREN, and in this parable we are exactly where we are meant to be: in our Father's house, resting in His bed!

Banging on someone's door at midnight when they are already in bed, is rather rude; it would be inconsiderate and thoughtless in just about any culture! As Jesus said, "Which of you will go to a friend at midnight and

ask for bread?" when it is the end of the day? Jesus seems to have expanded on this in verses 11-13 *"What father among you, if his SON asks for a loaf of bread will give him a stone; or if he asks for a fish will instead of a fish give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts to YOUR CHILDREN, how much MORE will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"* He focused on the *children*, not on the friend who kept asking for bread!

The three loaves of bread may be representative of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. From the context it seems that Jesus was using two examples: physical and spiritual - one is easily seen and obvious, the other is hidden and unseen. He first mentions physical food, and then speaks of heavenly food - the Holy Spirit. He Himself is our Bread and Meat. We are not awake at midnight with no Bread to feed ourselves or others with; we LIVE with the Bread and have no lack of it! It seems to be speaking of two different types of asking and two different types of relationship. One is asking from a position of lack and does not have an intimate relationship, the other is asking from a position of abundance and lives with the Father. The friend had no bread so had to keep asking till he was given some; but the children of the house *knew* that there was plenty of bread available and they could eat whenever they were hungry.

When we live in His house we rest in Him because we KNOW Him as "our Father"! While others may be knocking on doors at midnight because they do not have Bread to break with others - we are not lacking Bread because He is our *Father* who abundantly provides ALL His children needs, even while we sleep! *Except the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; except the Lord keeps the city, the watchman wakes but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to take rest late, to eat the bread of toil - for He gives to His beloved in sleep! Psalm 127:1,2*

The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids

This is a very similar message to the parable of the ten virgins/bridesmaids (*Matthew 25:1-13*). There are four groups of people in both parables. Firstly the Groom and the Father/Friend. Secondly the five foolish virgins and the visitor - who had no oil or bread of their own.

Thirdly the five wise virgins and the rude friend who know where to GET a supply of either Oil or Bread (the Holy Spirit and Christ), they know the Groom and Friend but it is not an intimate relationship. They know Him as the Giver, but don't know Him as THE Gift - they don't LIVE or dwell with Him in constant, intimate relationship where He IS their Life and Source of all.

The fourth group in both parables is hidden and not obvious although essential to both pictures; the Children are in bed resting, out of sight and hidden, and the Bride is preparing for her wedding. There would be no Father without the Children and there would be no Groom or Wedding without the Bride. We are both the Bride and the Children!

Too many settle for just knowing God as a Friend rather than as a Father. Too many settle for just knowing Christ as a Groom at a wedding rather than knowing Him as *their* Groom/Husband. The reason the foolish virgins were not admitted to the wedding feast was because He did not KNOW them (verse 12) even though they called Him Lord. He is always wanting and seeking intimacy and close, CLOSE relationship with us. The five wise virgins had enough oil in their lamps for one evening of celebration; but compare that with the option of being the Bride: united for all eternity with the One Who IS the Light of the world! They were attendants or bridesmaids at a great wedding feast; but compare that to being the Bride who is in love with, and being married to the One who is Love Himself! And the rude friend knew where to get Bread at a late hour; but compare that to living night and day with the One Who IS the Bread of Life! There is no comparison.

Both parables are at midnight; which may indicate the darkness and the lateness of the hour and that it is time to be in the Father's house, resting in Him and not doing our own works or trying desperately to find Bread or Oil through our own efforts.

The Parable of the Persistent Widow

In a certain city there was a judge who neither revered and feared God nor respected or considered man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, Protect and defend and give me justice against my adversary. And for a time he would not; but later he

said to himself, Though I have neither reverence or fear for God nor respect or consideration for man, yet because this widow continues to bother me, I will defend and protect and avenge her, lest she give me intolerable annoyance and wear me out by her continual coming or at the last she come and assault me or strangle me. Then the Lord said, Listen to what the unjust judge says! And will not our just God defend and protect and avenge His elect chosen ones, who cry to Him day and night? Will He defer them and delay help on their behalf? I tell you He will defend and protect and avenge them speedily. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth? Luke 18:2-8.

Who represents us in this parable? We are usually likened to the persistent widow who is totally dependent upon God - having no earthly husband to support, defend and protect her, or to avenge her - she has to rely on Another for those things and more. Or perhaps this may be an example of what NOT to be like by contrast, because clearly God is *not* an unjust judge like the judge in the parable! And in the Bible we are not normally referred to as God's widow at all, but as His beloved Wife and Bride. The widow might represent those who do not know Him as their Husband any more - He is not the Love of their life and they do not have an intimate relationship with Him.

We know that our God is the opposite of an unjust judge and He states very clearly that vengeance is His and that He will repay. (*Deut 32:35, Ps 94:1, Rom 12:19*) The not-so-obvious message in this parable may again be about trusting our Father because He is not only our Father Who protects and defends, but also our Groom who again, protects and defends! We have no need to go to any judge to beg for justice and protection; He provides it. Jesus ended this story by saying "HOWEVER, when the Son of Man comes, will He find FAITH on the earth?" THAT is the question and that seems to have been what He was getting at with this parable. Do we really know our God? If we do, we will trust and have faith in what He has told us and shown us about Himself (*eg vengeance is His, He WILL defend*) without feeling the need to continually hassle God about it because we KNOW that He is faithful and trustworthy far above all others!

I'm NOT talking about "declaring God's promises" and trying to make God do things through our so-called faith. That is not faith but

manipulation. I'm talking about KNOWING our Father as a little child does, and KNOWING our Husband as a wife does. A child and a wife KNOWS that these things are part of their Loved One's character, they KNOW that He would not lie to them and so they simply trust Him because of what He has told them and because of Who they know! Very simple, yet very profound. This attitude honours God because we trust that He will provide all we need instead of feeling the need to persistently hassle Him for it (although both wives and children seem to do that sometimes too)!

The widow was reliant on herself in being annoying and persistent in trying to make something happen, while as the Bride of Christ we are reliant on Christ and His character. The perspectives of the Bride/Wife from the bridal chamber and the child from the Father's house are quite different than the perspectives of the friend or bridesmaids or widow... *If God is for us, who can be against us? He Who did not withhold or spare even His own son but gave Him up for us all, will He not also with Him freely and graciously give us all other things? Romans 8:31,32*

This parable and the parable of the friend at midnight were teaching about prayer. The parable of the friend at midnight is given immediately after the disciples had asked Jesus to teach them to pray and He gives the prayer: "Our Father Who is in Heaven..." When we know God as "our Father", much of our praying will be changed. So much of what WE think we should pray, may exhibit our unbelief or distrust of Him. He is our FATHER! A Father is primarily a provider, protector and educator. No child keeps going to their father to ask over and over again for the basic necessities of life; if they keep doing so the father will feel hurt that his children do not trust him for even the basics; they must think he is an unloving Father. All good fathers will provide the necessities of life without needing to be constantly entreated. Our Father is the epitome of Goodness and Love! We know this from our experience! The Bible tells us that He clothes the lilies and feeds the birds, how much MORE so His very own children whom He dearly loves? This was part and parcel of His teaching the disciples how to pray.

Prayer must be based on faith and trust. The children in the household of the Father will ask for Bread whenever they are hungry, knowing full well that they will receive it; they know that there is a limitless supply available

for the taking! But the friend had to go knocking at the door at a very late hour with no guarantee of receiving anything... The widow had to resort to nagging because she was not married to Christ. The bridesmaids were part of the wedding party, but they were focused on their own lamps instead of getting married to the Light of the world. May God open our eyes and hearts to hear and see things from HIS perspective instead of our own!

"I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise, clever and learned, and revealed them to babies, to the childish, untaught, and unskilled. Yes, Father, such was your gracious will and good pleasure." *Matthew 11:25,26*



Prayer... but not as we've known it

The Spirit also helps us in our weakness, because we don't know how to pray for what we need. But the Spirit intercedes along with our groans that cannot be expressed in words. The one who searches our hearts knows what the Spirit has in mind. The Spirit intercedes for God's people the way God wants Him to. Rom. 8:26,27

In November 2012 our fit and healthy twenty year old daughter had an intracranial hemorrhage out of the blue. She was diagnosed with an Arterio-Venous Malformation (AVM) in her brain. After ten days in hospital, we faced a long recovery period and treatment - with substantial risks. In early 2014 she underwent the first of these treatments. We appreciated the many messages of support from friends and we had a very strong sense of peace, knowing that this was our Father's timing and way forward with this issue. And through it all, things that I'd seen in the past about prayer, became even clearer.

Our natural human response when facing something major, is to turn to people and ask them to *pray*. Even though we didn't ask anybody to pray, we still knew that many *were* praying. Most people pray when things "go wrong" (according to our very limited and biased perception of things) so...

Catholics light a candle and pray to Mary and other dead "saints".

Buddhists pray to their ancestors and Buddha.

Jews pray to HaShem.

Muslims pray to Allah, five times a day.

Hindus pray to Brahman, Krishna and many others.

New Agers pray to angels and spirits of love, creation, and the universe.

Christians pray to Jesus.

Prayer is not the exclusive domain of Christians; people in every religion pray. While we truly appreciate the concern and love that causes people to pray in a religious context, it needs to be recognised that prayer, in and of itself, does *absolutely nothing*. It is only *God* (the true God) who does anything! It is only what is initiated and inspired by *God* that will achieve anything. Too often our prayers are initiated and inspired by ourselves or others, and not by God at all, and so they only serve to make *us* feel better because we feel we are *doing* something useful.

I don't believe for one minute that I am a great pray-er or "intercessor". I know I still have much to learn in this area, and so I have struggled with writing this article. And yet I believe I am to write what I have learned and raise questions about what we think prayer is, because so much of what I see and hear from others about prayer seems to be *religious jargon* and religious acts based on *our* religious perceptions and not *true prayer* at all.

I'm aware that some of what I'm going to say here may offend some, but if it causes you to stop and think and ask God to show you *His* ways and *His* heart where prayer is concerned, then it may be worth the risk of offense and misunderstanding.

Our Prayers

Even though we profess to know that only God can do anything, we still try to *do* something! And prayer is a fine example of that - praying makes us feel that we are "helping" and those who are prayed for often feel comforted because they know that people have prayed. And so prayer meetings meet... prayer chains bind... and people enjoy feeling like they are doing something useful. But too often this "praying" and this "doing" originates from *us* and so it achieves nothing except to satisfy a self-gratifying desire either to pray, or be prayed for.

And, even worse, when God in His grace and mercy *does* do something on our behalf, what happens? People usually tell everybody and take the credit for it by claiming it to be an answer to *their* prayers... as though it

was *them* that caused God to do something! Oh, may God forgive our pride and arrogance... His work and His intervention is because of His *love, grace and mercy*; not because of us and what we do, so that not one of us can boast or take the credit or glory for it (Eph. 2:8,9).

Often we don't even stop to *ask* our Father what *He* desires. Instead of asking Him what to pray, we instead ask others to pray and even tell them what to pray. When we are listening to our Father's heart instead of our own heart, then we are often led in ways that we would not expect! For example, the evening after our daughter's brain surgery, she had a tonic-clonic seizure which caused the medical staff to drop everything. They called the resuscitation and crash unit and 10 or so staff were around her within a minute. As my daughter was recovering from this, I didn't feel that Father wanted me to pray for her or ask anything for her. Instead, He wanted me to talk with Him about a young man who was in the bed next to her. He was in a bad way after suffering a stroke, but to our minds, I should have been praying for my child, not somebody else's!

Several years ago friends of ours moved towns and put their house on the market. To us, the obvious need was for their house to sell and they asked people to pray that it would sell. Months went by and it didn't sell. One day when I was reminding Father about this, He stopped me and asked, "Why are you asking Me to sell their house?" I stated the obvious: "Because they need it to be sold...". He said, "Have you asked ME if that is what they need?" Of course, I hadn't, I'd presumed that I knew. After admitting this, He told me I was to pray for our friends *themselves*, and not for their house to sell. He wanted me pray with Him that they would learn what it was that He needed them to learn through their circumstances. As it turned out, their house never did sell and things didn't work out in the new town, instead they returned to their house after six months. They would have had no home to return to if it had sold.

Christians seem to like to share "prayer requests", even about people that they do not know - often bordering on gossip - it can be a time of prying rather than praying. Our relationships and friendships are brought about by God for a reason. But even with intimate knowledge of what is going on in our friend's and family's lives, we still do not really know how or what to pray. Our praying simply *must* be inspired by God's Spirit and not by our own spirit or by apparent needs.

Many seem to have the idea that the more people who pray, the more likely it is that God will hear and the prayer will be answered. Where does this idea come from??? This is a *human* idea, that more is best, bigger is better, and that large numbers equal success. It is an *earthly* concept, and not heavenly.

It is just our *natural, human, earthly* way of viewing things to think that "many" or "more" means effectiveness and therefore the more who pray the better, and large numbers will mean success. From our perspective Gideon and his army being reduced in numbers was a really stupid idea, because we think that bigger is better. But our mathematics are all wrong. We need to have our minds (and arithmetic!) transformed so that we see things from our Father's heavenly perspective instead of from our own earthly perspective.

From a heavenly perspective, to add is to subtract (John 3:30), the greatest is the least (Matt. 11:11), to be big is to be little (Luke 9:48), to lose is to find (Matt. 10:39), to be weak is to be strong (2 Cor. 12:9), and to lose all is to gain All (Phil. 3:8). This is the complete opposite to our ways of thinking, because God's ways are far superior to ours!

Lots of Prayer

Jesus taught, "Whenever you are praying, you shall not be verbose like the heathen, for they think that they are heard by speaking much" (Matt. 6:7 Aramaic Bible). "Speaking much" could be translated in our vernacular as "talking a lot" or "many prayers". Jesus said that this is what people in other religions (the "heathen") do; they think their prayers will be answered by praying a lot or speaking a lot. Many Christians today are no different; they share "prayer requests" to try to get "much speaking" happening - as if that will cause God to suddenly hear and move on someone's behalf! But Jesus went on to say, "*Don't be like them*, for your Father *knows* exactly what you need even before you ask Him!" That speaks of TRUST rather than desperation. That speaks of peace rather than fear. That speaks of knowing your Father and understanding that what He desires is what is most important, rather than trying to convince Him of what you think is important.

The example of Elijah in 1 Kings 18 can teach us a lot. The people prayed and prayed to their god all day long and yet nothing happened. Then, in stark contrast to "all day with many people praying", *one* person, Elijah, said in less than a minute: "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, make known today that You are God in Israel and that I'm Your servant and have done all these things by Your instructions. Answer me, Lord! Answer me! Then these people will know that You, Lord, are God and that You are winning back their hearts." And God responded immediately.

Why did Elijah do what he did and ask what he asked? Because *God had instructed him to*: "I have done all these things *by Your instructions*". And yet with us today, how many people think *they* know best and basically *tell* God what He needs to do for them in "prayer", instead of first asking God what HE wants to do? The people praying to Baal were asking him to do what THEY wanted; but Elijah first communicated with God and found out what HE wanted.

Even Jesus said, "I can guarantee this truth: *The Son cannot do anything on His own*. He can do only what He sees the Father doing. Indeed, the Son does exactly what the Father does.... *I can't do anything on My own*. As I *listen* [to the Father], I make My judgments. My judgments are right because I don't try to do what I want but what the One who sent Me wants" (John 5:19,30). This offends those who rely on themselves, but delights those who rely on God.

It is simply our pride that makes us think that we know exactly what God wants to do, and therefore what we will ask Him to do. Our prayers are often an awful revelation of our selfishness and pride. True prayer is more about *hearing* and listening to God, than about speaking to Him. It is more about *us* being changed, than things around us being changed. But so often humility of heart is lacking and so we barge on in with our requests and demands, like spoilt children who think the world is centred around them and their father must do what they ask.

Even with our own children we would consider it rude for them to tell us what to do or demand that we do what they think we should, yet in "prayer" Christians seem to think this is acceptable. As a parent, we love

to have our children talk with us about their problems, their dreams and their desires, and our Father is no different. But we don't like our children telling us exactly what we must do for them, or having them beg us for the basics of life; we expect them to *know* that we will do the very best we can for them. They *know* that; they have no need to beg for it. They *know* they can trust us. Is our heavenly Father any different?

In November 2014 my daughter and I were flown to another city for further treatment including radiosurgery. Our daughter decided she didn't want to tell family or friends when she was having this done as she didn't feel she had the energy to deal with the responses. So, out of respect for her wishes, we didn't tell family or friends, except for one. We felt it was a great opportunity to quietly prove God's care even when people weren't praying for us and didn't even know what was going on. Our trust is in *God*, not in other people, and certainly not in how many prayers are prayed for us!

I was very conscious of God's peace, strength and comfort in the midst of it all. When we did tell our friends and family once it was all over, the reactions were interesting. The more religious the person, the more offended they seemed to be - they didn't get to pray for us! However, if their praying was always initiated by the Spirit and not by self, then why would they be offended? If God hadn't prompted them to pray, then clearly there was no need to.

We often "ask amiss" (James 4:3). God really *does* know what is best! Remember that the Hebrews in the wilderness kept asking and asking for what they wanted, and finally God gave it to them, "He gave them their request, *but sent leanness into their soul*" (Ps. 106:15). As T. Austin-Sparks puts it, "God's judgments are usually the confirmation of our own choices". We can choose to accept and trust His way in faith, or we can choose to make things go our own way, to our own peril.

I grew up in a religious environment where it was customary to always pray before we made a trip anywhere; praying for protection and for safe travel etc.. It felt as though we expected the worst to happen and that prayer would somehow protect us and prevent the worst from happening. It reminds me of the dark ages when people were very superstitious and would pray and sacrifice to gods so that they would be "protected". Why

is it that so many who claim to know God, and claim to know that He is good and loving, still live in dread and fear of what might happen instead of living in confident trust in Him and His constant loving care? He knows what we need and often provides for us even before we ask and before we even recognise His provision. We have no idea of the many times He has protected and defended us without our knowledge - He is the *best Father* - ever!

Many seem to have a walk of fate instead of a walk of faith. Instead of "prayer warriors" there seems to be an army of prayer worriers!

To put this attitude into context, imagine you are the parent of young children. Every time you go out in your car, your children beg you to drive safely, *please* protect them and look after them, and don't let anything bad happen to them. Over and over they ask this, every time you go out! This would hurt you as a parent and you would wonder what you had done wrong for your children to distrust you so much.

Much of our praying reveals that we simply *don't trust God*; it exhibits our lack of trust. The way many people talk and pray, it sounds as though they do not think that God is even capable of taking good care of His children unless we beg Him to! That's quite an insult to any good father.

It's not that we don't ever feel fearful, because we are human and we do feel afraid sometimes, but we run to our Father and tell Him whenever we are scared or troubled and He comforts us. We are part of His household, part of His Family and He takes good care of us. We communicate *everything* to Him, as children do, but our communicating is from a place of *trust* instead of fear! It is a secure place of knowing that He cares, He protects, and that He is right there with us, no matter what happens. Children get frightened easily, but the more they turn to their parents for reassurance and comfort, the more trusting and confident they are.

We are born into death in this world and part of that heritage is being born into fear and being easily frightened. Fear is an attitude we must *unlearn*. Instead we must learn to trust! Christ has freed us from the tyranny of fear and death, so that we can live in Life and Trust. It is often only when we feel that things are out of our control that we desperately turn to God in prayer, but we need to see that we never have been, and

never will be, in control. We need to be transformed into Acceptance-With-Joy instead of being Much-Afraid (from Hannah Hurnard's allegory, "Hinds' Feet on High Places"). Every breath we breathe is a gift from the Giver of Life and this life is intended to be a living communication of love and joy straight back to the Giver who has given us All in Christ!

True Prayer

So, what instructions do we have in the Bible about prayer? Firstly, we're not to make a big deal out of it. Jesus didn't say to organise a prayer chain, search for others to pray with, go and pray in a church, have a prayer meeting, or even ask people to pray with you or for you. Instead He taught: "When you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private" (Matt. 6:6). This was the complete opposite of what had become acceptable and normal in their religion, where prayers were recited at least three times a day (even more on the Sabbath and on feast days) and preferably with a quorum of 10 men in a temple. Yet Jesus typically went off by Himself to pray.

The example that Jesus Himself gave us, has to mean something. And Who did Jesus appeal to? "Our *Father*..." Who did He teach His students to appeal to? "Our *Father*..." This is about personal communication between our *Father* and us as His children. Children know and trust their parents and are confident that the parent knows what is best, even when the child doesn't!

In English, particularly old English, the word "pray" meant to "ask" or "beg". For instance, in old English they would say, "Come here, I pray". Even in the King James Version of the Bible the word "pray" was used to mean begging or asking: "Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched" (Gen. 18:4). But the word "pray" in English has now become a completely religious word; nobody uses it as "ask" any more. Regardless, true prayer is far more than simply asking for something or talking to God. There is something deeper here that we need to see, and to see it, we must go back to the original word for "prayer" used in the Hebrew...

In Hebrew, the word translated as "prayer" (tefillah) means to think, intercede and entreat and is apparently a difficult word to translate into

English: "The common translation—prayer—is horribly inaccurate. Prayer [in English] implies two distinct entities, an inferior one making a request of a superior. There is another Hebrew word for this: bakashah. Similarly, worship has a word: shevach. Tefillah incorporates both these elements, but is itself neither of them. Instead, communion may be a better word..." Communion is two-way - sharing heart to heart. It is not just "asking" or "much speaking", it is far more than that. It is two sided; a sharing of emotions, desires, hopes and thoughts. Tefillah, even in Judaism today, is understood to be more about *self examination than about making requests*; this is quite different from our western definition of prayer.

The word translated as "pray" in Hebrew is "palal" and is the root of "tefillah". Palal is a reflexive (reflective) word and means to think, judge, intervene, and mediate. The Hebrew understanding of the word is to examine yourself, clarify things, and judge yourself before God. This is *prayer...* but not as we've known it! When we spend time examining ourselves we often find that it is *our own attitudes* towards the people and circumstances we are in that need to be changed, rather than other people or situations. Communion with God helps us to see that.

We certainly do need to examine ourselves as the Spirit leads... for instance, when we ask God for something, is it because of what WE want, or is it because He has spoken to our spirit so we know what HE is wanting? Are we more concerned about ourselves being changed into the person God desires, or that circumstances and people around us be changed? Are we really searching for *Him* first while trusting that all these other things will be done or not done, as He sees fit (Matt. 6:33)?

True prayer is based upon trusting God! It is *giving up your agenda*, and taking up God's agenda. Most importantly, true prayer is *not a way to get God to do what you want*. True prayer is NOT a way to get God to give you what you want, or to do what you think needs to be done.

We seem to think that prayer is all about our words, when it is more about our hearts... Sometimes when I mention someone to Father whom I know to be in great need or difficulty, it feels as though He says, "I know, I've got this; don't be concerned, it's been dealt with already". Other times, someone comes to mind who, as far as I know, is in no difficulty at all and yet I find I'm crying with Father for them, even though I

may have no no idea why, and no words. It seems that our natural, earthly knowledge is of little to no use when it comes to prayer; it may in fact be a hindrance because we tend to rely on *our own* knowledge of people and situations instead of relying on God's Spirit leading us. We easily take up the appeals and missions of others because they appeal to our religious desire to *do* something. But true communion with God, by its very nature, must come from above and be other-worldly, heavenly, and spiritual. It must both come from, and go to, the heart of God.

So why would God even want us to ask Him for anything at all when He already knows our needs and desires, as well as His own? Because true prayer is about *our co-operation, communion and partnership with God*; it is a "high calling", something that He desires to share with us! It is primarily about His desire for intimate friendship and fellowship with us: communion and communication. We share our concerns and our joys with our family and best friends, and it is exactly the same with our Father. He shares His concerns and joys with us, and we share ours with Him... it is a sharing of one heart.

The "Lord's Prayer"

The fact is that *we do not know what is best for either ourselves or for others*, and so we don't truly know what to ask for! We may humbly make requests, but we desire primarily what God wants, and not what we want. Maybe this is what it means to ask in His Name, to ask in His behalf, as Jesus taught (Jn. 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23,24,26). This was how Jesus prayed, "*Not* what I want, but what *You* want" (Luke 22:42) - He ignored His own desires, judging between what was His own human desires and what God wanted. This is to "palal" - to examine our heart in prayer.

This understanding of prayer is related to what is called "The Lord's Prayer" in Luke 11. Jesus taught His students to examine their hearts for unforgiveness, He also taught them to ask for what God wants, not what we want: "May what You want be done on earth, just like it is in heaven" (the Greek word translated as "will" means "want", as explained in: "God's Will... But not as we've known it").

The sequence of what Jesus said is interesting: "May what You want be

done on earth, just like it is in heaven... keep supplying us every day with the bread we need... forgive us when we miss the mark as we also forgive all who owe us... let us not enter into testing but rescue us..." Then He immediately says, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and will say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread. For a friend of mine who is on a journey has just come, and I have nothing to put before him'. And he from within will answer, 'Do not disturb me, the door is now closed, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and supply you with anything'? I tell you, although he will not get up and supply him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his shameless persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. So I say to you, Ask and keep on asking and it shall be given to you; seek and keep on seeking and you shall find; knock and keep on knocking and the door shall be opened to you." (Luke 11:6-9).

In this parable, God is represented as the friend in the house who, although very inconvenienced, eventually gives the Bread in response to the persistent asking. Sometimes we do need to be encouraged to keep asking, seeking and knocking, but who really represents *us* in this parable? Most assume that we are the friend without bread. But there were more people in this picture than just the two men. Parables often have a hidden meaning, so think about this: Are we normally referred to in the Scriptures as God's friend or as *His children*?

We are His CHILDREN, born from above, and in this parable we are exactly where we are meant to be: in our Father's house, resting in His bed! Jesus seems to have expanded on this in verses 11-13 where He went on to focus on the children, not on the friend who kept asking for Bread.

Jesus Himself is our Bread. We are not awake at midnight with nothing to feed ourselves or others with; we LIVE with the Breadmaker and Breadwinner and have no lack of food! The story seems to be speaking of two different types of asking and two different types of relationship. One asks from a position of fear and lack and does not have an intimate relationship with the Giver, while the other asks from a position of trust and abundance and lives with the Father. When we live in our Father's house we rest in Him because we KNOW Him as "our Father"! While others may be knocking on doors at midnight because they do not have

Bread to share with others, we are at rest with our Father who provides for ALL His children's needs, even while we sleep (Ps. 127:1,2).

This raises another question. Did Jesus, as a man with needs just like us, ever ask anybody to pray for Him and His needs, or even ask anyone to pray with Him? We have no record of it if He did. We know that His followers asked for prayer, but Jesus Himself did not. He usually went off by *Himself* to talk with His Father. The only time when you'd think He might have really needed His friends to pray for Him was in the garden of Gethsemane. There He simply asked them to stay awake with Him, and to keep watch; and, surprisingly to us, *not to pray either with Him or for Him*. Why would this be? Is it possible that He was being an example to us of complete and utter trust in His Father, even in spite of what He knew was about to happen? Could it have been evidence that prayer is primarily private communication with God as He inspires, rather than a public display that man requires (Matt. 6:6)? Was it an example to us of relying on God instead of on man? Was it because He did not want his students to ask God for things according to their own natural judgement - in this case to prevent His suffering and death, just like Peter had already suggested (Matt. 16:22)?

Jesus, when He was struggling with facing His death, asked three times that He not have to go through with it (Matt. 26:37-44). That is humanity; we don't like to suffer. "While Jesus was here on earth (as a man), He offered prayers and pleadings, with a loud cry and tears, to the One who could rescue Him from death. And God heard His prayers because of His deep reverence for God" (Heb. 5:7). It seems strange that "God heard His prayers" and yet Jesus still had to die! Not all of our requests are given. We *do* go through very difficult things here on this earth, and we *do* plead with our Father for His strength, wisdom and help as we struggle with difficulties here.

True prayer is from our heart, and sometimes our heart will be heavy with what it perceives and endures. True prayer often is a very real struggle; perhaps because true prayer is often more about changing *us*, than what is around us. Paul wrote of striving, labouring, and struggling in prayer.

Does God hear when we call out to Him and ask Him to intervene? YES, of course He does, and often He responds in ways we do not expect!

And, amazingly, He wants to include us in that process which is what true prayer is all about. But where are those who will take up what is on *His* heart, see Him intervene, and won't take the credit for the results themselves? Such people seem to be rare, and perhaps are (out of necessity) hidden from view...

We are not under the old contract (covenant) where people had to go to spiritual leaders and ask them to pray to God on their behalf. Instead of asking many people to pray about what concerns us, we ask only One - each of us pray directly to our Father through one Man, one Deliverer, one Priest/Leader, one Mediator, one Giver, one Intercessor: Christ (1 Tim. 2:5, Heb. 7:25, 8:1,2; Rom. 11:26).

Living in Christ we know His voice and we rest in Him, we trust Him and know that He loves to govern and direct our hearts as we listen to Him. This means living in a Place of great freedom and trust - in Him - *being* a living prayer in constant communion with our Father, and *being* a true "beth-tefillah" - house of prayer!

All glory to God, who is able, through His mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.
(Ephesians 3:20 NLT)



Prophecy... but not as we've known it

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son... (Heb. 1:1,2).

There is much teaching and seeking and speaking of prophecy, the prophetic, and prophets these days. There is no lack of "prophecies" or "prophets" for those who seek them. Many travel quite some distance to hear these "prophets" prophesy and will pay sums of money for the privilege. The emphasis is primarily upon the words being spoken... but we suggest that the focus needs to shift from the speaker, to the hearer. As Amos prophesied: *"Behold the days are coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, **but a famine for HEARING the words of the Lord.** And the people shall wander (TRAVEL) from sea to sea and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, but shall not find it."* Amos 8:11,12

Prophecy and the prophetic are about individuals having ears to hear and eyes to see how God speaks in these last days: by His Son! That has surprisingly little to do with any messenger or prophet. AND because this is about Him and not us, the messenger can take no glory or pride in having 'succeeded' or 'failed' in the delivery of any message because it had little to do with them in the first place. Words ARE very important, they are death or life and we are personally responsible before God for every word we speak. But, we are ALSO personally responsible before God for every word which we accept and receive, and for every word which we reject. That is a personal, individual thing which no one else can be held accountable for. This puts rather a different light on the prophetic; it is not so much about what is spoken but about what is HEARD by us! The hallmark of the Good Shepherd's sheep is not that they go around making a lot of noise bleating but that they HEAR and KNOW and FOLLOW the voice of their Shepherd! (*John 10:27*).

We tend to place much emphasis on the prophetic voice. BUT the voice itself is actually not that important. Our Creator constantly desires to communicate with us and will often use anything or anyone to speak through (*even the occasional donkey!*) or even unbelievers and secular films and songs! He can speak through ROCKS if His living stones are silent! So what or who He chooses to speak through is not as important as what He says.

Ears to Hear

We, in our pride, tend to think that of course we would recognise His voice and listen to Him, and yet history proves that this is not usually the case. Even if God spoke through someone raised from the dead, people would still not believe (*Luke 16:31*). Often when a person doesn't want to accept a message, the messenger immediately becomes the focus. If the messenger is made the object of controversy, we can deceive ourselves into thinking we do not need to listen to their message by telling ourselves that the person was too intense, or they weren't serious enough, or they were too serious, or God doesn't give negative messages like that or... fill in the blank; the list goes on and on ad infinitum! We can always find a reason in any human to reject them and what they say because we are all fallible and imperfect creatures. The issue is one of discernment.

When a living stone is being used to speak on God's behalf, it will not always be obvious, recognised or heralded and if we are not careful the stone may become a rock of stumbling to us... It seems to be God's way to use the weak and foolish to confound the wise - His ways are not our ways! When we do speak things on our Father's behalf, He will often have spent much time working those words into our lives first; either through experience or prayer. They will become internal and personal before they are external; it will be something which God has dealt personally with us on. We hear, see and receive, and then we communicate that which we have heard and seen and assimilated in the hope that others will also see, hear and receive. We are usually very good at hearing and seeing for others and not always so good at hearing and seeing for ourselves and allowing God to deal with US before delivering a message to a brother or sister.

The prophet IS the message as much as being a messenger of a message. God told a number of prophets to 'eat the scroll' or eat the words He gave them. The words (*and the Word Who is Christ*) became an integral part of the prophet before they even spoke. No longer could you separate the two. Their speaking then flowed naturally as part of who Christ was in them and the hearing was up to the individual.

Why does God do it this way? Simply so we're totally reliant on Him both for ourselves, AND for others. We rely on and trust Him not only for our own personal hearing, but also for those to whom He may give a message through us. We are not responsible for someone else hearing or not hearing, that is between them and God. What we ARE responsible for is our own personal hearing and speaking. Jesus frequently said "He who has ears, let him HEAR!" Jesus spoke truth because He WAS Truth and yet many, in spite of their ears, still did not hear! *"If I speak truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is of God listens to God. Those who belong to God hear the words of God. This is the reason that you do not listen to Me; because you do not belong to God and are not in harmony with Him."* John 8:46,47.

The prophets in the Bible often spoke with a 'thus saith the Lord' and hopefully without much of their flesh coming forth, and yet their messages were often still not received. Why were they rejected and stoned regardless? Because of hard, stubborn hearts and deaf ears that refused to hear... surely there is nothing new under the sun! And often those hard stubborn hearts and deaf ears are much closer to home than we would like to think!

A Mouth to Speak

Ezekiel, Jeremiah and Isaiah were called to speak to a stubborn, rebellious people who did not have eyes to see or ears to hear, they would not hear because they had hard hearts, but the prophets still had to speak regardless. It is the nature of God's justice and mercy that He will still speak even when hearts and ears will not hear and receive because then a choice has been made by the individual. Paul quoted Isaiah: *The Holy Spirit was right in saying through Isaiah the prophet to your forefathers: Go to this people and say to them, **You will indeed hear and hear with your ears but will not understand, and you will***

indeed look and look with your eyes but will not see or perceive what you look at. For the heart of this people has grown dull, hardened and calloused, and their ears are heavy and hard of hearing and they have shut tight their eyes, so that they may not perceive and have knowledge and become acquainted with their eyes and hear with their ears and turn to Me that I may heal them. Acts 28:25-27.

Why would God bother speaking to people who refuse to listen? Because He is a just God. It would be unjust to hold someone responsible for something that they had not had the opportunity of hearing and responding to. One reason for having to be personally accountable for what we receive and reject as God's words to us is because God will sometimes test us to see if we will listen to and obey man, instead of God.

Often we do not hear Him through each other because of our preconceived ideas of Who God is and what He will and won't say to us through another; but, our God cannot be put in a box and often will offend us in order to reveal something about ourselves that we'd rather not see... Many these days think that a word from God must be only positive, only encouraging. Even the false prophets in the Old Testament thought that and yet God, through Jeremiah, addressed this: *Thus says the Lord of hosts: Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They teach you vanity and fill you with vain hopes; they speak a vision of their own minds and not from the mouth of the Lord. They are continually saying to those who despise Me and the word of the Lord, The Lord has said: You shall have peace and they say to everyone who walks after the stubbornness of his own mind and heart, No evil shall come upon you. For who among them has stood in the council of the Lord, that he should perceive and HEAR His word? Who has marked His word and has actually heard it? The anger of the Lord shall not turn back until He has executed and accomplished the thoughts and intents of His mind and heart. **IN THE LATTER DAYS you shall consider and understand it perfectly.** I did not send these false prophets and yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. Jeremiah 23:16-21.*

A Heart to Know

"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many

times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us **by His Son...**" (Heb. 1: 1,2. This reduces the true prophetic to just One Thing: Christ. In knowing Him, we will know what He IS saying, and what He is NOT saying...

A New Testament example of discerning for yourself what the Spirit is saying, is with Paul in Acts 20 & 21. He tells of how the Holy Spirit had told him to go to Jerusalem. Then chapter 21:4b says *"Prompted by the Spirit they (the disciples) kept telling Paul not to set foot in Jerusalem."* The Holy Spirit told Paul one thing and then apparently prompted the disciples to say the opposite! Obviously God will sometimes test us through our own brothers and sisters to see how firm we will remain to what He has Himself revealed to us or called us to do or say. Further on in the same story Agabus, a prophet, had confirmed what was in Paul's heart, but then another group of disciples still tried to dissuade him from going ahead! We need to be humble enough to admit that we do not always know what is right for an individual, even when we are sure we have heard from God. Who knows what is best for a child, their Father or a brother or sister? We must always give each other the freedom to hear and follow what our Father tells each of us personally. If we allow someone to persuade us not to do something that He Himself has asked us to do, God will hold us personally responsible for heeding human voices and human wisdom instead of His voice and His wisdom.

A living relationship of communion and communication with Christ through the Holy Spirit is vital; HE is our Light and Life, He is the Word that is a lamp to our feet, He is the One who direct us! If we do not ourselves have ears to hear Him Who IS the Spirit of prophecy, if we do not recognise His witness and testimony within us personally, then how can we possibly expect to hear Him or recognise Him through another? Jesus deliberately made things difficult to understand so that HE would be sought for the answers.

Discerning the prophetic is as simple as discerning Christ, "for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10). Does the prophetic word you heard point you to Christ? Does it testify of Christ? Is He the focus? If not, you may want to reconsider the source/spirit of it.

Truth

Truth, integrity and honesty are at the core of the prophetic, it is about truth being lovingly expressed in all things: speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly. It is not ever about man's titles, testimonials or advertisements! God now wants to speak to EACH ONE! If each one is listening to Him primarily and others secondarily, then it is not difficult to hear Him. There is much wisdom in this because it deals immediately with our natural tendency to depend on man instead of God. It means we are personally responsible for what we discern and hear and accept. It also means that there is no place for posturing, self-appointed 'prophets' who need to announce their 'gifting' with testimonials before they speak, and then make threats about 'touching God's anointed'. This can easily be seen as being manipulative and intimidating. We must allow God to put His authority on our words; not our own self-imposed authority! If God is speaking through us, we will not need to advertise the fact or defend what we have said. The responsibility for His words being heard and received is not ours but His and no amount of convincing talk on our part will ever cause them to be heard. The recipient will either have ears to hear and eyes to see, or they will not! We must reject what is false and deceitful and each express and embrace the truth. (*Ephesians 4:25, 5:8-11*).

Jesus was THE Prophet above all prophets and yet He didn't need to tell people when He was speaking as a prophet because those who had ears to hear knew because of the authority that was on His words; those who did NOT have ears to hear.... crucified Him. He said: *"If any man desires to do God's will, he will know and have the needed illumination to recognize, and can tell for himself whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking from Myself and of My own accord and on My own authority. He who speaks on his own authority seeks to win honor for himself."* John 7:17,18.

Jesus had the right to be called a prophet more than anyone, so did He want to be known as a Prophet? *"When the people saw the sign that Jesus had performed, they began saying, Surely and beyond a doubt this is the Prophet Who is to come into the world! Then Jesus, knowing that they meant to come and seize Him that they might make Him king, withdrew again to the hillside by Himself alone."* John 6:14,15. We are so ready to proclaim someone a prophet and set them up as a king that we can look up to with great respect and awe... but Jesus WAS the great

Prophet and He more than anybody had the right to be recognised as a king, and yet He didn't accept or allow it. Jesus didn't want any titles, He simply wanted to be known as the Son of God: *"Who do people say that the Son of Man is? And they answered, Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. He said to them, But who do you say that I am? Simon Peter replied, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God". Matthew 16:13-16*

Why should we be any different? Being a spokesperson, messenger or prophet is not as personal or as special as being the CHILD of the One we speak for! Being a daughter or son of God is an amazing privilege and we DO speak on behalf of our Father at times. Christ continually directed people back to His Father and stressed that we are simply brothers and sisters. As such, most brothers and sisters listen to their Father for themselves unless for some reason a sibling is not listening or is too far away to hear for themselves...

The Heart of the Prophetic

At the very heart of the prophetic is the heart of God. If we have hearts ready to receive and obey God, we will both hear and see what God desires us to. True prophecy comes straight from the heart of God. When we KNOW His heart, then we can speak on His behalf and from His heart of love and those who KNOW His heart will not be fooled by a prophecy that comes from the heart of man. When God reveals something of His heart to you, it hurts to sense something of His longing and deep desire and passion for His people and to see how we so often let Him down... It is a huge privilege to share a small portion of the pain that He feels, He wants us to feel and to know His heart. The prophetic is more about sensing and sharing the heart of God (*HEARING Him and SEEING from His perspective*) than simply speaking. He will show and tell us many things that are never to be spoken but are simply shared in that place of intimacy and relationship with Him as He shares His heart with us. Sometimes we will simply identify with Him in His suffering, pain, or joy; other times we will pray through what He has given us, and sometimes we will be required to speak out that which we have seen and heard. Sometimes that speaking will be with much agonising, gentleness, pleading and love, and sometimes the speaking will be hard and with no emotion at all. God knows who to speak to gently, and who to speak to

like a hammer! *"Is not My word like fire that consumes all that cannot endure the test? says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks in pieces the rock of most stubborn resistance?" Jeremiah 23:29.*

Speaking on behalf of God is usually a thankless task and there is always a price to be paid. The risk of misunderstanding and rejection is great no matter how much care and love is behind the words that are given. Ezekiel was told to expect rejection and misunderstanding: *"The house of Israel will not listen to you and obey you since they will not listen to Me and obey Me, for all the house of Israel are impudent and stubborn of heart."* Ezekiel 3:7. God SPEAKS but the people do not always HEAR! God is trying to communicate with us all the time. But do we have eyes to see, ears to hear, a heart to receive and a will to obey? Without Him showing us and teaching us; we are thick, dumb, deaf and blind!

One of the reasons why prophetic words are rejected is because the nature of the prophetic is Light; it is revealing. The Light of Christ reveals what was previously hidden; both good and bad and separates the two. *When anything is exposed and reprov'd by the light, it is made visible and clear; and where everything is visible and clear there is light. Therefore He says, Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall SHINE upon you and give you light. Ephesians 5:13,14.*

When something bad (darkness) is challenged by the Light, some people will reason that the words were not from God because they brought condemnation and judgment rather than conviction and redemption or restoration. Sometimes the reason for this perception is because those who do reject the true words of God HAVE in fact, just brought judgment upon themselves by rejecting His words, and they rightly feel convicted for that! Jesus clearly said: *I have come as a Light into the world so that whoever believes in Me, whoever cleaves to and relies on Me may not continue to live in darkness. If anyone HEARS My teachings but fails to observe them and does not keep them but disregards them, it is not I who judges him. For I have not come to judge and to condemn and to pass sentence on the world but to save the world. Anyone who rejects Me, refusing to accept My teachings, HAS HIS JUDGE; for the very message that I spoke (and that was rejected) will itself judge and convict him at the last day. John 12:46-48.*

Like a Lightning Bolt

Prophetic revelation can be likened to lightning. It often comes as a flash of inspiration which energises and enables us to see very clearly what is illuminated by the Light. Sometimes it not only reveals, but destroys. Put simply, prophecy is revealed truth. Who is Truth? JESUS, Who IS the Spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19:10). He IS Light, Life and Truth; all of which are elements of prophecy - it reveals Him Who is Truth. Lightning is very powerful, five times hotter than the surface of the sun, it is the result of negative and positive charges. Lightning is full of energy. One of the Greek words for God's working power is 'energeia' - energy; another is 'dunamis' - dynamite; both of which can be applied to lightning. Much about lightning is still a mystery to us, but we do know that it is essential for sustaining life on the earth; it produces ozone and nitrates which are essential for plant life, but it can also be destructive; it can bring life or death. It also plays havoc with our power/energy systems on earth. Ninety percent of all lightning never touches the ground, it remains in the thunder cloud or travels from cloud to cloud; it stays in the heavenlies but occasionally zaps earthly stuff! *The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. **The voice of the Lord splits and flashes forth forked lightning.** The voice of the Lord makes the wilderness tremble; **the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.** Ps 29:4,8,9*

Even those who are blind and do not have eyes to see the lightning will know something has been said because they will hear the accompanying thunder. In John 12:28 John heard God speak, he heard the words of God, but others said that it had simply thundered because they did not have ears to hear His words, the same was true of Saul/Paul when he encountered Christ (*Acts 22:9*)! If people are deaf and blind it leaves ONE thing; they can still feel the effect of the thunder through the ground shaking! A prophetic word will sometimes shake a person to their very core; even if they have rejected the words and are deaf and blind, their spirit will still KNOW and react accordingly.

So see to it that you do not reject Him or refuse to listen to and heed Him Who is speaking. For if they (the Israelites) did not escape when they refused to listen and heed Him Who warned and divinely instructed them here on earth, how much less shall we escape if we reject and turn our

*backs on Him Who cautions and admonishes us from heaven? Then (at Mount Sinai) His voice SHOOK THE EARTH, but now He has given a promise: Yet once more I will shake and make tremble not only the earth (physical) but also the heavens (spiritual). Now this expression, Yet once more, **indicates the final removal and transformation of all that can be shaken - that is, of that which has been created (physical, fleshly) in order that what cannot be shaken (spiritual reality) may remain and continue.** Let us therefore, receiving a kingdom that is firm and cannot be shaken, offer to God acceptable worship with modesty and godly fear and awe; for our God is indeed a consuming fire. Hebrews 12:26-29*

Like a Diamond Chisel

Being used as a prophetic person is also like being a diamond chisel in the Jeweller's hand which is used to shape His jewels (*people*). Diamonds have four aspects which are important; colour (*the whiter the better*), carat (*the weight*), clarity (*the clearer the better*) and cut. The cut of the diamond is the only thing that man is used for; all the other characteristics are natural and inherent in the diamond. The cut is very important as it determines how much Light will be reflected in the jewel. The only stone that can cut a diamond, is another diamond and so God will also use other jewels to cut and shape us into what He desires.

BUT, the tool does not know what to cut, it is the Jeweller Who decides what and when He will cut on each individual jewel. It is clear that many of the prophets did not always fully know or understand what God was saying through them or why (*eg Daniel*). God simply requires our availability and obedience. Should we feel the cutting of His tool/words upon our hearts, we must not blame the tool that is being used, but accept and submit to our Father's shaping and purifying work in our lives and die to self. That which is already dead, cannot be hurt.

Many believe that prophecy must only build up. Yet there are two sides to the prophetic, the encouraging and the discouraging, the positive and the negative. In the same way, there are two types of tools that are used to shape jewels these days, one is the diamond point chisel, the other is a laser. A laser is concentrated Light and is far easier, quicker, efficient, more accurate and powerful than the chisel. A love for the Truth and the

Light is fundamental to any prophetic person. *"He who practices truth comes out into the Light; so that his works may be plainly shown to be what they are - done with God's help, in dependence upon Him."* John 3:21. The Light instantly reveals what was hidden, both good (*more light*) and bad (*darkness*).

The laser, will bring revelation like a flash of lightning. The chisel, on the other hand, cuts slowly and painstakingly and appears to be very hard or harsh in it's working. It is entirely the Jeweller's decision which tool He will choose to use for each living stone. Not all have hearts of flesh, many have uncircumcised hearts of stone. While one tool may bring revelation and encouragement to a heart of flesh, the other may bring revelation of the things that are hindering God's work in a person's life.

Here is an example of New Testament prophecy which revealed hard hearts: *You stubborn and stiff-necked people, still heathen and **uncircumcised in heart AND ears**, you are always actively resisting the Holy Spirit. As your forefathers were, so you are! Now upon hearing these things, they were CUT TO THE HEART and infuriated and they ground their teeth against Stephen. Acts 7:51,54.* Stephen said that their hearts and ears were uncircumcised. Circumcision is symbolic of dealing with the flesh, having it CUT or chiseled away from our hearts and ears. We don't usually mind receiving encouraging messages, but we don't like receiving correction and we sure don't like circumcision! Yet Jesus said *"Those whom I dearly and tenderly love, I tell their faults and convict, convince, reprove and chasten, I discipline and instruct them. So be enthusiastic and burning with zeal and repent, changing your mind and attitude."* Revelation 3:19.

The Burden of the Prophetic

Another example of New Testament prophecy is Peter knowing by the Spirit that Ananias had lied about the sale of his land. Peter then prophesied to the wife saying *"LISTEN! The feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also. And instantly she fell down at his feet and died."* Acts 5:9,10. Peter's words to Ananias revealed something that had been already done in secret, his words to Sapphira revealed what was about to happen and they could not be interpreted as encouraging, uplifting, confirming, or edifying words

of prophecy either...

The prophets in the Bible often described the prophetic as being 'the burden of the word of the Lord' and it was something that they felt and that weighed upon them. It was sometimes a message that was heavy and discouraging both for the one giving it, and for the one receiving it. There is great cost associated with it. Not only the message but the messenger themselves may well be an oracle (*or burden*) to the ones they are sent to. Jesus was something of a burden to those NOT wanting to hear Him... and still is. The typical response is still "Crucify the one that burdens us" in an attempt to silence the message. *Jesus said to them, If God were your Father, you would love Me and welcome Me gladly, for I came forth from God, I did not even come on My own authority or of My own accord as self appointed but He sent Me. **WHY do you misunderstand what I say? It is because you are unable to hear what I am saying. You cannot bear to listen to My message; your ears are shut to My teaching.** John 8:42,43.*

If this was the response to Christ then, we shouldn't be surprised if the reaction is the same when He speaks today, in these last days God is still speaking through His Son. While it is very painful to see something which others cannot see, and to hear Someone others cannot hear, we cannot open anyone's ears or eyes so we shouldn't be discouraged when others don't hear or see, but simply need to keep our own eyes and ears firmly focused and fixed on God and to speak out what He says and when He says.

Then while it is still called Today, if you would HEAR His voice and when you hear it, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion in the desert when the people embittered God against them.

Hebrews 3:13-15



Illumination... but not as we've known it

You are a chosen race, a priesthood of kingly lineage, a holy nation, a people belonging specially to God, that you may make known the perfections of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light. 1 Pet. 2:9

Sometimes God plants a word into me, and I don't know what He means by it for many days, or even months. It has to be planted, and then I have to wait for it to grow and bear fruit in me. This time the word was "illumination". I seemed to see the word everywhere, we even went to a concert called "Illuminations of the Beyond" (by Messiaen) and yet, funnily enough, I had no illumination as to what God was saying to me about it, beyond the obvious.

I knew that the darker it gets, the brighter the light is, and we're all aware of how important light is, especially at night. If you go outside on a pitch black night with no illumination, you can do nothing except stand still. If you try to walk without light, you may injure yourself and others. Not to mention not knowing what direction to walk in! Some form of illumination is vital. Spiritually it is exactly the same. If we do not have the Light shining on us, in us, and through us, then we may go the wrong way, be injured, or cause injury to others simply because we cannot see. You may in fact end up at a standstill, unable to go on.

Darkness hides things while light does the exact opposite: it reveals and illuminates. When light pierces darkness, you begin to see things you were blind to before; in dawn's light you first see vague shapes in black and white, then objects, then full colour, and eventually you can discern and correctly perceive exactly what things are and where they are. With partial light we cannot make correct judgments about what and where things are.

And, of course, illumination is vital when reading the Scriptures, not just so I can physically see and read, but so that I can *spiritually* see and

read! It is a fact that while we can physically read what is written in the Scriptures, we can still have absolutely no spiritual illumination or revelation about what we just read. It takes *spiritual illumination* to "turn the light on" and enable us to *really* see what the words mean. Our mind may comprehend, but it is our *spirit* that needs to apprehend. If we try to interpret or understand the Scriptures with our mind only, then we are likely to misinterpret and misunderstand; the Author always knows exactly what He means by His own words and only He can illuminate them for us. We must read in the Light (Author) so that we may receive "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; illuminating the eyes of your heart" (Eph. 1:17,18).

This cannot be stressed enough. Many people rely on their head knowledge of the Bible and what they think they know and thus they effectively blind themselves to further illumination and revelation from the Author Himself. The verse just quoted speaks of the knowledge of HIM, and not the knowledge of a book; it is heart knowledge of THE Word as a Person, rather than head knowledge of many words about Him.

I recently read a book about an illuminator who lived in the 1700s, and over the course of several weeks, Father began to illuminate for me a little more of what He meant by giving me this word to ponder. I had never heard of an illuminator before. For those who don't know, centuries ago the artist who would decorate the pages of Bibles for the church (and sometimes other books too, but they were almost exclusively Bibles) was called an illuminator. Here is an example of the work an illuminator would do.



This amazingly intricate work required hours and hours of intense concentration and talent. Often the illuminator would decorate or illuminate only one letter on an entire page. What was illuminated to me, is that we are called to do the same thing. We see only such a very small part of the whole Book, the whole Person of Christ, but when He (as my Illuminator) reveals something of Himself to me, I in turn reveal and shine that one "page" for others to also see, doing my best to reveal and illuminate what I have seen through the words I use. We are individually and collectively the living letters/pages of Christ (2 Cor. 3:3). We are part of Him as The Book, *The Word of God* (John 1:1,14) with His words written on our hearts and illuminated by the Master Illuminator!

In April 2017, my husband Mike celebrated his birthday with a party. One of the gifts he was given was a card from my aunt and uncle. After the celebrations were over, I had a closer look at the card and realised that it was beautifully handmade. Knowing that my aunt is a very talented artist, I asked her if she had made it, and she confirmed that she had. And, it was an illumination! I now have it in a frame on our wall, it is a very

special gift from a very special person:



Historically, illuminators would be cloistered away for years doing their work. Unlike some, I don't write lots and lots of words. I seem to spend many hours over few words, instead of producing many words over few hours. Just as the illuminators would spend hours and hours painstakingly drawing and colouring, applying layer upon layer of gold gilt and colour to their work, so I also spend hours and hours with words. And it is not so that they are perfect, nice to look at, or easy to read, but so that I am sure that they are *faithful to convey what I see the Author and Illuminator of the Book wants*; because then the words are treasured and valued because of Who the words come from and belong to.

The illuminators were sometimes paid for their work, and the more of a book they illuminated, the more costly and expensive that book was. Anything of real value is costly, but not only in terms of money. I don't write to sell books, I don't even write to convince others of what I write about. My primary aim in writing is simply to record what I have seen and heard from Above, doing what my Master requires and desires. And that may, or may not, be beneficial to anyone other than me! And it may even be for a time in the future and not for now, so I am not interested in statistics or how many people read and comment on what I write. I don't do what I do because people want me to, but because my Father wants

me to. Regardless, it is a costly thing in time, energy, integrity, and resolve, while also being a very deeply valuable thing, rewarded with the presence and companionship of working with the Author of All!

It is better to write one sentence, even only one word that is illuminated by the Holy Spirit of God, than to write a book or an entire library. He does not need our superfluous words. He can convey an entire universe of meaning to a person through one single letter if need be!



Books used to be people's most prized possession just a few generations ago; they were treasured. Books were often locked away to preserve them. Today, in contrast, books are very cheap, and to a certain extent, words are cheap too. The written word is *everywhere* you look now, and we have a surfeit of things to read. Today there is too much information and too little transformation. Never before in the history of the world has there been such access to such excess. And we often have an excess of things to say as well as to read! But although the art of illumination is now largely a thing of the past, illumination from Above will never be a thing of the past; these illuminated words are living and are full of Life, Light and Love now, today!

But of course, the most common understanding of illumination is not of applying gold and paint to a page, but simply that of light. The Greek

word used in the New Testament for "light" is translated in various forms such as enlightened, illuminated, make men see, give you light, to light up, bring to light, render evident, give understanding to. The word is *phos*, or *photizo*, and is the origin of our English word "photo". And anyone who loves photography, knows how important light is.

Light is Life

Light and illumination are essential to life; our natural world and our spiritual world cannot survive without it. If there was no light, there would be no life on this earth and the same applies to us spiritually.

Light is absolutely necessary for Life and yet many people *run* from Light or hide from Light instead of embracing it. I recently bought some wheat, and when I got it home I saw that it had weevils in it. Thanks to growing up in Borneo I knew exactly what to do with it, I spread it out on a tray and put it in the sun outside. The weevils simply could not stand the light of the sun and immediately vacated the premises! Within a matter of minutes, the wheat was weevil free. Just like weevils, evils cannot stand the Son shining His Light on His harvest. As Jesus said, "Judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants" (Jn. 3:19-21).

Even though there is darkness all around, and even though the Light in Christ has come, many prefer the darkness. Coming into the Light is costly. Some reject God's Light when He shines through us because they love the darkness more than the Light; in other words, they have something to hide that they do not want to see or have exposed and illuminated.

"Light is transparency; light is clearness; light is absolute purity; light is honesty; light is openness of character. Light hides nothing; its whole action and nature is contrary to hiding anything. It has nothing to hide; it shows everything; it shows all: in other words, it is not deceitful. It does not want to cover anything, or to pretend or make believe that something is other than what it is. Light is single; it is not

double; there is no duplicity about light. And light is just - light! There is "no darkness at all" where there is light.... How many shades and aspects of darkness there are! - a whole vocabulary of words. The Spirit has come to bring all that to an end by applying the Cross, in which it was all brought to an end in the Person of the Lord Jesus; to work out the meaning of the Cross in our lives, so that everything that belongs to that kingdom of darkness is removed: so that in the end, with us too, there is no darkness at all. Is that really what we think of, when we think of having, receiving, and being filled with the Holy Spirit? Here again, perhaps, a little re-shaping of our ideas is called for. It is true that He is many other things, as well as Light: He is the Spirit of Power, He is the Spirit of Wisdom; yes, He is many other things; but, with them all, He is this. And we must not make more of those "demonstration" aspects of the Spirit, in power, in gifts and capacities, in works, than we do of His character side. If He really does His work in you and in me, He will make us to be people who can bear to be "looked into" without any fear, without any drawing of the blinds. Our lives and our motives will bear looking into." (*T. Austin-Sparks - "The Holy Spirit, the Church, and the Nations"*).

Light is Love

Love is synonymous with Light - Light and Love illuminate so that we can see what is true. Love is a very seeing thing, it sees through, it sees into, it sees the truth, and it *loves* regardless! This is made obvious in Christ by the fact that He knows man, He knows the heart of man in all its ability to hate and deceive, and yet He loved us so much that He gave up His life and died for us. He loved, He SAW, and still loved!

"Love is as far removed from blindness as heaven from earth. "Love is blind"? No - not true love. The fact is that *true love sees everything, but transcends everything*. The love of Christ for His disciples was not blind love that did not know His men, love that was duped, deceived, misled, but eventually found out that they were not the men He thought they were. No, "He... knew what was in man" (John 2:24). His love saw everything, could tell them beforehand exactly what they would do; but love persisted in face of it all. Love is a great seeing thing. If you are consumed with a burning love for the

Lord, you will be very quick of scent as to what is doubtful and questionable. You will not need to be frequently and continuously told when a thing is not right. No, love for the Lord will bring you quickly to see and to sense there is something that needs to be adjusted. You may not know what it is at the time, but you have a sense that all is not well. Love will do it." (T. Austin-Sparks - "*His Great Love*").

There is Light from Above, but there is also false light that is really darkness. How can this be? Our heart and its desires are likened to a lamp in the Scriptures. In speaking of the heart Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there is your heart also, but the *lamp of the body is the eye*; therefore if your eye is sound, your whole body will be illuminated. But if your eye is bad, your entire body will be darkness; if therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great will be your darkness! No man can work for two masters, for either he will hate one and will love the other, or he will honor one and the other he will ignore. You cannot work for God and for money" (Matt. 6:21-24). You can see that in the context, it is the *heart* and what the eye of the heart sees and wants that is likened to the lamp of the body. That "lamp" of our heart can result in true light, or false light: "the light that is in you is darkness". Interestingly, the Greek word for "darkness" here can also mean blindness and darkened eyesight - the two go together: when it is dark, when we aren't walking in Love, we can't see well at all.

The key to the source of the light (for even our enemy transforms into a messenger of light - 2 Cor. 11:14,15) and whether it is true Light or false light is often revealed by our own hearts, by our treasure, by what we love and want. When we believe that the darkness in us is really light, then *how great* that darkness, deception, and blindness is! If you believe that you are walking in the Light when you are really walking in darkness, then you will not even *try* to seek out real light; instead you'll say, "I am rich, and have prospered, and *don't need anything or anyone*," and you do not know that you are really poor and blind and naked (Rev. 3:17). May God have mercy on us and give us a Damascus road experience with Light from heaven striking us to the ground, revealing our religious pride, so that we can really see and hear only Him! Only then will we be capable of being filled with His Light and Love.

Light is Truth

Truth is synonymous with Light - both Light and Truth illuminate, reveal, and lead - "Send Your light and Your truth; let them lead me" (Ps. 43:3). Light and Truth result in knowledge. But we have a choice to see or not to see. As Paul said, "We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:2-6).

The Light from Above is often a very revealing, exposing thing - a true searchlight. Many do not want to see and live in the Truth, Life, and Love of God and yet God IS Light! "This is the message that we have heard from Him and declare to you: *God is light, and in Him there is no darkness*—none at all! If we claim that we have fellowship with Him but keep living in darkness, we are lying and not practicing the truth. But if we keep living in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:5-7).

From the very beginning, God separated the Light from the darkness. And in our own lives He must separate the Light from the darkness - that means revealing to us things in us and about us that have their source in darkness instead of His Light - revealing what is false and revealing lies that we either mistakenly believe to be true, or know are untrue. We might not like to see those things, or admit them, but it is essential that we allow His Searchlight to illuminate them so that there is no longer any darkness (duplicity and deception) in us.

Light is Christ

Another form of light is from fire. Christ, being the Word of God, is our Lamp and must be burning within us. The Menorah/Lampstand in the tabernacle had to burn continually and was not allowed to go out (Ex. 27:21, Heb. 9:2). In that holy place there was no allowance made for the entry of natural light; there was only the light from this golden lampstand, fueled by oil. So too, in the tabernacle of our lives, we must learn to see (discern and judge) all things by the light of the Golden Lampstand who is Christ, and not by any earthly, natural light - not by what we see and think we know naturally - that is ruled out, it doesn't count.

The lampstand in the tabernacle was a symbol of testimony - it testified not only of its own light, but it testified of all that the light revealed - it was a revelation of all that could be seen and more! In the same way Jesus Christ reveals Himself to us, and as our Light He also unveils and reveals what is around us that we could not see otherwise. All is in darkness until the Light comes.

His testimony is also our testimony and to a certain degree His story is also our story. We too are born spiritually and then have a period of growth where we learn to walk, talk, see, and discern - we are learning Christ in the school of Christ. As we grow into maturity we experience the Cross of Christ. We too lay down our lives in death, just as our Teacher did; "It is finished" - I am finished. And just as He was resurrected, so we too are resurrected to new life, being born from Above. And just as He did, we also testify that we are alive and have Life (Acts 1:3). We realise that we are no longer of this earth, we are heavenly; we ascend with Christ and recognise that our real life is with Him there - we become not only the children of God, but the *sons* of God reigning with Him! It was only after Christ's ascension to the heavenlies that the Holy Spirit was given in fullness: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be My witnesses, telling people about Me everywhere" (Acts 1:8). Light - power - witness - these three are linked, Light is a very powerful testimony in and of itself!

Being Light

Not only did Jesus declare that He is the Light of the world (Jn. 8:12), He also proclaimed that WE are the light of the world too, because we have Him Who is Light living in us: "You are the light of the world—like a city

on a hilltop that cannot be hidden" (Matt. 5:14). Everything becomes clear in the light, and what was hidden becomes visible, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But *everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light*. This is why it is said: 'Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.' Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:8-16).

The first meaning in Hebrew of the word for watchman (tsaphah) was to shine, to be bright; to look out, to enlighten the eyes, to peer, to watch closely. Watchmen would stay up all night long, and with their torches lit they would look for anything strange or potentially dangerous. They were (and still are) very important. Their work is predominantly when it is dark, when it is hard to see, and when most people are asleep and unaware. The watchman keeps watch and shines his light on anything that may be harmful and alerts those who may not be able to see it.

The role of the watchman in the Old Testament was literal, but under the new covenant it becomes spiritual. We are told many times in the Scriptures to be alert and to be on watch: "For you are all children of light and children of the day and you are not children of the night, neither children of darkness. Let us not sleep therefore as the rest, but let us be watchful and sensible." (1 Thess. 5:5,6).

As watchmen our job is to first see and then say what we see to make others aware of what they may not have seen. Humility is essential. Not one of us is immune to deception or blindness - we need to hear what other family members we are close to can see in the light of the Golden Lampstand because without a mirror we cannot see ourselves; we can only see each other. This is one of the very practical reasons why our Father places us alongside other Family members - so that we can help one another by what we see in His Light. There is no condemnation, but only love, because the brothers and sisters that Father knits us together with are *part of us*, we are *one* in Christ. All is exposed in His Light, so

while today my brother may help me to see the log in my eye, tomorrow I may help my sister in the same way!

What we say is what we have *seen*, with the aim of bringing others into that place of illumination and seeing, with the eyes of our hearts being lit to see what God wants us to see. In His Light we see the earthly for what it is, and we see the heavenly for what it is, and there is no compromise between the two!

We must stand out like a light in the darkness of this world, like a city on a hill all lit up, like the city mentioned in Revelation 21:23: "The city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its light". We are part of this City of God NOW! We are here on this earth as His light, and with no apologies and no reservations, we SHINE as His Light enters into and illuminates our lives and our hearts!

"Arise! Shine! Your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has dawned. Darkness now covers the earth, and thick darkness covers the nations. But the Lord dawns, and His glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings will come to the brightness of your dawn" (Is. 60:1-2).



Life... but not as we've known it

The gateway to Life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it. Matt. 7:14

It's time I admitted to myself and the world, that I have a fatal condition. I don't know how much longer I have left to live, but the prognosis is not good; my condition is definitely terminal. Some sufferers live for only a matter of minutes while others survive for many years, but this condition always degenerates and finally ends in death. I was born with a heart condition; not just a heart murmur, but a heart that shouts of its restrictions. The name of this condition is: *Letalis Ideo Frux Egredior* more commonly known as LIFE! Yes, it is an ironic fact that life on this earth is a fatal condition that will inevitably end in death, but it is also a fact that there is a death that inevitably ends in Life...

Immortality, as something that man can attain to, is legendary. It is the holy grail. Many seek immortality or eternal life, and yet few ever find it. Christians talk a lot about having "eternal life", and yet in spite of what they say, they are often found to be dead in their religion rather than alive. Perhaps this is because they know eternal life only as a thing in the sweet by and by and don't realize that eternal Life is not something that we can grasp hold of, nor is it merely "living forever". The truth is that eternal Life is not a thing at all, eternal Life is a *Person*. And this Person, Jesus Christ, is not only real Life, but also embodies Truth, and is the Way to know God. He has been given to all of us in this world who suffer from this fatal disease as the 'Holy Grail' of God, so that whoever spiritually accepts and chooses to "drink this spiritual Living Water" will live forever in union with Him. (John 4:14).

However, the heart condition that each of us are born with often prevents us from accepting and knowing this Life. Many refuse to drink this Cup, because the cure to our fatal condition is totally the opposite of what we might think. Jesus said, "I have come so that they may have Life, and have it to the full." But as Spock on Star Trek would say, "It's life Jim, but not as we know it". Yes this IS Life, but not as we have ever known it, and it is also Life as many do not *want* to know it because of the great

offence and cost to us.

This Life is a choice: "I have set before you Life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore *choose Life*, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He *is* your Life" (Deut. 30:19,20). But in order to choose Life, we first have to choose death: a death to all that we want... "If we die with Him, we will also live with Him" (2 Tim. 2:11). This is not speaking of our physical life, but our daily life as we know it: who we are, our will, our desires, our plans. Those things are very, very difficult for us to die to and give up. Everything in us and around us tells us the exact opposite: stand up for yourself, protect your rights, fight for yourself and "never surrender"!

But this Life and this Love is worth giving up *everything* for. This Life is very precious and therefore very costly. Consider the cost...

This Life offends us because it demands our death, but everything in us fights to live.

This Life offends us because it requires our dependence, but we want to be independent and self-sufficient.

This Life offends us because it needs us to see that we really know nothing, but we think we know everything.

This Life offends us because it requires humility and emptiness, but we are proud and full of who we are.

This Life offends us because it is given freely without our being able to do anything to be worthy of it, but we love doing things to make us feel valued and worthy.

This Life offends us because it doesn't accept our being just good and nice, it wants us dead and buried.

This Life offends us because it demands everything we hold dear: our very selves...

And consider the reward: LIFE! This death and letting go of our life is the

only way of experiencing what comes after death: resurrection Life! Ironically, it is the ending which brings the new beginning, and the dying that brings new birth and new Life. So many Christians talk about resurrection Life as a thing that happened to Christ instead of knowing resurrection Life as *a Person Who is real and present now* and in whom they are experiencing and living resurrection Life NOW! "This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought Life and immortality to light through the gospel." (2 Tim. 1:9,10). This is the Life that we are offered: the resurrection Life of Jesus Christ, living in us every day! This is not some 'truth' to know, it is Truth to be experienced.

Life is the most important thing in the world; everything else pales by comparison, but often what we think is real life, is not life at all. It can be an illusion and a lie designed to keep us from searching for real Life. We may think that we are in control and are living a good life, but *that is only because we have not yet experienced real Life!* I used to think that I knew God and was living an "abundant life" until I was brought to Life; then I knew that I had really been dead. Some of this experience I have already written about elsewhere. You cannot know real Life until you have known real death. You cannot appreciate sight until you have known blindness...

To those who have not yet experienced eternal Life, this will probably sound quite absurd! You cannot explain Life to someone who is dead and you cannot describe sight to someone who was born blind. If you know that this Life I'm talking about is not a reality for you personally, and you want it to be, then I urge you to honestly talk to God about it and ask Him to bring you to Life. Only He can do it, and this Life is God's desire for you, now, today: "God gave up His only Son because He loved the world (that includes you!) so much. Anyone who trusts Him will not be destroyed, but will have continuous, uninterrupted, inexhaustible Life!" (John 3:16, The Irresistible Life). That is the essence of Love: giving up what is precious to you for the sake of the one you love. We in turn show our love for Him by giving up what is most precious to us: our lives. God has done all that is necessary in giving us His Son and He longs to breathe His Life into you and bring you to Life... "*This is eternal Life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*" (John 17:3).

God's way is the opposite of our way. We can only know real Life through surrendering to death. "We were dead and buried with Him... so that just as He was raised from the dead by that splendid revelation of the Father's power, so we too might rise to Life on a new plane altogether. If we have, as it were, shared His death, let us rise and live our new lives with Him!" (Romans 6:4-6 J B Phillips). These are not just words; they are practical truth and they are reality. This new Life can be tested and proved in your life today. Just as a witness at a trial must testify of what they have personally seen, so we too, testify of this Life that we have personally seen and experienced, "This is the testimony: God has given us eternal Life, and this Life is found in His Son. (1 John 5:11). YES, this is real in our lives!

In this new Life we learn to see, hear, speak, think and walk differently as Christ Himself by His Spirit lives in us. Not only do I now live in Him but He has chosen to permanently live His Life in conjunction with mine. He is committed to me just as I am to Him. And while I can see why we would want to live in Him, I cannot comprehend why He would want to live in me... Love is the only answer I can think of, and that is the glory AND the mystery that Paul speaks of: Christ IN you, the Hope and the Glory! God is as much into me as I am into Him.

Jesus declared, "I am the Resurrection and the Life" and as our Life He is living and real, and Life with Him is an adventure far surpassing our adventures here on this earth! He leads us spiritually to where we have never been before and shows us things we have never seen before! What greater adventure could we ever have than to personally and intimately know the One Who created us... this One who is so different to us, and so far above and beyond our understanding and comprehension... In Star Trek their mission was "the final frontier... to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life... to boldly go where no man has gone before." Our exciting mission is to learn Christ, to explore, seek out and know this new Life Who lives within us, for this is not like the life we have known before! His Life continually leads us to new horizons, new worlds, new challenges, new depths, new heights, new revelations of Himself... and this adventure of Life will go on forever because there is no death in Him and there is nothing finite about Him! He is amazing, awesome, GOD, the Father of Life!

I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised Him from the dead. I want to suffer with Him, sharing in His death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead! Phil. 3:10,11.



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