

**FREE**

A Twelve Tribes Freepaper

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# Chattanooga: *Do You Remember?*



**Whatever Happened  
to the Folks at the**

# The Yellow Deli

**Were you there? Do you remember? After all these years, we miss you and still talk about those times together. We invite you to come back home.**

**THE PEOPLE AT THE  
LIGHT BRIGADE WANT YOU TO KNOW...**





Originally appeared in *Helen Exum's Memorable Meals* (1974, Chattanooga News-Free Press). Reprinted with permission.



*Gene and Marsha Spriggs opened the Yellow Deli to cater to young people.*

## A Sandwich at the Deli

The inside of the Yellow Deli is dimly lit with lights under shades that used to be bushel baskets. The paneling is of weathered barn siding. At the windows are gingham curtains, and at the side of the room is an old-fashioned wood burning stove.

At the rustic tables you are served an unforgettable lunch of a ham and Mozzarella cheese sandwich on an onion roll, steamed until it is hot and good. You might have a fruit salad or banana bread topped with fruit, or carrot cake for dessert.

Gene and Marsha Spriggs started the Yellow Deli in 1972, shortly after they became Christians, and in a couple of years their work has grown until now they are planning more Yellow Delis in nearby towns. As well, they run several houses for young people who are runaways, hitchhiking, mixed up, or for some reason displaced.

At the counter in the Deli is a sign: "Need a warm place to stay? Hitchhiking? Stay a day. We're just ordinary people who have found what



it means to be free and to be real."

"There's an underground among runaways," Gene Spriggs explains. "Whether they're in California or Florida, they compare towns and pass on tips. Word has gotten around that if you come through Chattanooga, go to the Yellow Deli and get food and lodging for a couple of days."

Gene and Marsha preside over a family of about fifty every night in four houses on Vine Street that they have remodeled. They share what

God has done for them, they love a wide range of people and each one has a story — one girl had worked in the Playboy Club in Miami, a boy had been on the road for six years. One hitchhiker from Canada brought her child.

This warm, loving friendly group of Christians staff the Deli, which is open 24 hours a day. They are like early church Christians — they have answers to prayer, they share, they witness.

But the amazing thing is that a place like this is crowded with lines of people waiting to get in for their fabulous sandwiches. Gene and Marsha are particular about weighing 2½ ounces of thinly sliced meat to go on each sandwich. They have a wide variety of meats and cheeses and breads to choose from. You can order roast beef, chicken or turkey. And it can go with Swiss cheese, Mozzarella cheese, American, cheddar or pepper. Then you decide between Rye bread, pumpernickel, whole wheat, white, onion rolls or Kaiser rolls.



# Chattanooga: Do You Remember?



*Like a burst of sunshine as cheery as its bright yellow logo, the Yellow Deli is fondly remembered by many Chattanoogaans whose lives were touched by its ministry.*

Somehow God's love had been communicated to our hearts in such a way that all we wanted to do was pass on that love, joy, and peace spoken of in the New Testament. Though at the time, a good restaurant and spiritual concepts seemed to have little in common, but for "the Yellow Deli people" it was the perfect combination. For us, it was somehow like the "treasure hidden in a field," and the "pearl of great value"... it was a salvation that had a practical outworking and not just a Sunday-go-to-meeting mentality. Our Savior meant everything to us, so working together to serve the best food in the best atmosphere, with all of our hearts, seemed a normal response. The fruit of the Spirit was produced naturally

*(continued on next page)*

The early '70s would not have been such a special time in the Chattanooga area without *The Yellow Deli*. Remember those luscious fruit salads, great sandwiches, fresh salads, and homemade desserts? There was something about the warm and rustic atmosphere that drew people like a magnet. It became an important part of the lives of so, so many Chattanoogaans back in those days. Fond memories linger on...

And who can forget that catchy little slogan at the bottom of the hand-drawn *Yellow Deli* menu that proudly announced, "We serve the fruit of the Spirit... Why not ask?" It was not so much a boast as a matter of fact.



*Inside the Downtown Yellow Deli — a distinctive flatiron building on Market Street*

## ***A Sandwich at the Deli (continued)***

When it comes to your table in a basket with potato chips and dill pickles, it is hot and steamy and delicious. Which is why businessmen, career girls, old ladies, and lots of young people love to eat at the Yellow Deli.

"We try to serve the fruit of the spirit," says Marsha. And it comes through — the love, joy and peace too. And when it comes over, it's real, not fakey, as the young people say. The Spriggs and their Yellow Deli crowd are great friends.

[www.yellowdeli.com](http://www.yellowdeli.com)

## **MENU**

**Yellow Deli Meat and  
Mozzarella Cheese Sandwich  
Kosher Dill Pickles  
Potato Chips  
Carrot Cake or Banana Bread  
Papaya Juice**

## **DELI SANDWICHES**

First choose your bread ... either onion rolls, Kaiser rolls, rye or pumpernickel bread. Next choose the meat — very thinly sliced roast beef or turkey. The cheeses are cheddar, Swiss, Mozzarella, or hot pepper cheese.

Put mayonnaise on one half of the bread and mustard on the other. Put 2½ ounces meat on one side, and your choice of cheese on the other. Now put into a steamer and give steam a minute or two. This will melt the cheese and heat the meat.

At home, make the sandwich and put in a packet of foil, wrapped individually. Put in a 350° oven for 20 or 30 minutes. It will be steamy and hot.

Serve with potato chips and dill pickles.

— Marsha and Gene Spriggs

## Chattanooga: Do You Remember?



*Gene and Marsha Spriggs' warmth matched that of the potbellied stove in the Yellow Deli.*

from the good tree of happy believers working together.

That was the motive in the hearts of Gene and Marsha Spriggs when they

opened the first *Yellow Deli* on Brainerd Road in May of 1973. They wanted to have a place where people from all walks of life could come into the deli and touch a living demonstration

of God's love in those who served them. They created a warm, informal atmosphere in this 24-hours-a-day café where the people of Chattanooga could come anytime and feel welcome and enjoy good food and friendship. Many still carry fond memories of their times at the *Yellow Deli*, because it was more than just food... it was an experience of the heart that they enjoyed there, and times like that are not easily forgotten.

It all started in East Ridge in a simple little house on Ringgold Road. We hung a sign above the front door saying, "The Light House." We had the hope that in the darkness of our troubled society, we could reach out with the pure love of God we had found like a beacon of light to lost people in the midst of a storm. We understood little more than this in the early '70s when we began. We were young and small and not so

powerful, but our love and zeal for our Savior was strong. We wanted to share this love with everyone we saw. We sought out other Christians with whom to fellowship. We visited many local churches, and when we moved our home from East Ridge to a neighborhood near the UTC campus, we ended up going to First Presbyterian Church, which was just down the street. We called our new home the "Vine House."

We were convinced that the love of Jesus could change the world if people could just see it being lived out in reality on a daily basis. We had a burning desire to see that love even heal the strife and division we were seeing between the Christian churches we grew up in. In our midst at the Vine House, we continued to try to be obedient to the commands of Christ in reality. Sadly, it felt as if our uncompromising stand began to drive a wedge between us and those who preferred a life of compromise.

Many people who encountered us at the *Yellow Deli* commented that they saw us like a breath of fresh air, something new and genuine, and many were being

saved.

At that time, we were still attending First Presbyterian Church every Sunday and went to "727" (their potluck fellowship) every Wednesday night. Though we recognized the obvious distinction between our simple zeal and the more elaborate religious structure of the established church, we continued trying to reach out to the sincere in that church and hoped that healing could spread to the Body of Christ throughout



*Marsha Spriggs painting the Deli on Brainerd Road, what else — yellow.*

Chattanooga. We could sense that God wanted to stir up His people and restore something that had been lost in the first church in Jerusalem long ago.

But as time went on, we sensed that there was something holding people back from having the same "sold-out" zeal we had found. We knew from our Savior's own words that the greatest hindrance to giving a hundred percent to God comes when we love the world or the things of this world. We groped and struggled to understand whether this was somehow the cause for so many who profess faith to be so very lukewarm. But then, on January 12, 1975, came a turning point for us. When we arrived at the church we had been attending for the evening service, the door was locked and there was a sign saying: "There will be no evening service this Sunday because of the Super Bowl."

Shocked and confused, we sadly returned home. What could this mean? What could be more important than worshipping our God?



*The original Yellow Deli on Brainerd Road*



# The Vine House & The Yellow Deli



*It all began at a place on 861 Vine Street, which we called "The Vine House."*

We had thought that everyone in the church really loved our heavenly Father, but the Apostle John wrote, "Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."<sup>1</sup> Additionally, James wrote that friendship with the world is hostility toward God.<sup>2</sup> Wasn't the Super Bowl a thing of the world? Could it be a prime example of what the Apostle John warned about at the end of his letter? "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."<sup>3</sup>



*We recently noticed another church making room for the Super Bowl in their worship*

It wasn't just a matter of a one-day event. Church being canceled for the Super Bowl revealed to us that the affairs of the world were more important than the fellowship of the saints, than building the church to be the witness of Christ that Paul had in his heart when he wrote Ephesians 4:11-16. At that

www.yellowdeli.com



*The Downtown Deli, as with all of the delis, did not come about overnight. It took months of hard work to build the beautiful rustic barnwood decor.*

point, we quit *going* to church and started *being* the church. Like a baby eagle set free to fly, we found it liberating to just be "simple believers" who could daily live out our faith, rather

than trying to spend our time trying to justify the religious system with its many contradictions. Intellectuals can quickly disqualify the faith proclaimed by the Son of God by merely pointing out the half-hearted lifestyle of those who claim to be His followers. We wanted nothing to do with that kind of belief, and hoped to live a daily life of faith that would prove to the world that God really did send His Son.<sup>4</sup>

From that point on, our road was not clearly marked for us. We began to feel a bit like pioneers forging a path that had long been overgrown since the early church days. We didn't want to be just one more division in an already hopelessly divided system of Christianity. We trusted in God's love and we knew that He would lead us and reveal Himself to us as we walked this way.

We knew that the love of God we had found compelled us to love one another with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We began to see and experience that love producing a



life that was beginning to look like the pattern we saw in the Book of Acts, chapters 2 and 4. In the simplicity of this faith, we started meeting in the **Rose Garden at Warner Park on McCallie Avenue in Chattanooga** every Sunday.



*Our early worship gatherings were simple — singing together while seated around the room on the floor.*

We called our gatherings "Critical Mass," not because of anything to do with "Sunday Mass," but rather because of the scientific definition describing the chain reaction effect that happens within an atom. Our informal gatherings were not led by one

<sup>1</sup> 1 John 2:15 <sup>2</sup> James 4:4 <sup>3</sup> 1 John 5:21 <sup>4</sup> John 13:34-35; 17:21,23



the physically torturous techniques of brainwashing used by the Chinese on American soldiers. The people using this technique charged high fees and would forcefully kidnap people, hold them captive against their will, and try to take their beliefs out of their minds and put into their minds what they wanted them to believe. All manner of fear and intimidation were used by these people to reach this goal. It was used by Catholics to deprogram Baptist family members, by Baptists to deprogram Mormon family members, but used more so to get young people out of new religious or spiritual groups that sprang up in the '60s and '70s outside the mainstream. The list of victims went on and on until brainwashing was finally proven in court not to be valid.

*Gene had a way of bringing the scriptures to life during engaging "rap sessions."*

man, but were free for each person to spontaneously speak whatever was on his or her heart. Though we had not planned it that way, we found that our meetings resembled what was written about by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 14: 24-26,

*"If all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you. What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, another language, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up."*

No longer was everything scheduled as it had been in the established church — when and what to sing or say, and only the preacher being allowed to bring a teaching from the Word. The freedom of "Critical Mass" was exhilarating.

Almost overnight, some of the church leaders began to accuse Gene Spriggs of "turning inward" once we began having Critical Mass. They started spreading rumors that he was on an authority trip and that that was why he and the Vine House people stopped going to First Presbyterian Church. These rumors escalated to the accusation that the people of the

*Yellow Deli* were "brainwashed" and under "mind control"! This unfounded accusation spread fear among some of the parents who had previously been so happy that their rebellious, immoral teenagers had been forgiven and found a life of love and friendship with the *Yellow Deli* people.

Those fears led some parents to hire "deprogrammers."

### Deprogramming

"Deprogramming" had been introduced to the public in the early '70s as a supposedly harmless way to change the mind of someone. It was a technique that had been used by the military in warfare to combat

## CRITICAL MASS



*From the beginning, we played simple instruments and sang with all our hearts.*



*A "Critical Mass" on a Sunday afternoon at the Warner Park Rose Garden.*



## The Vine House & The Yellow Deli



*“We serve the fruit of the Spirit, why not ask?” was more than a slogan — it was what made the Delis special.*

Many deprogrammers were jailed for their practices, and many have had huge lawsuits against them. Now, in 2006, deprogramming is viewed as a despised practice of uneducated fanatics rather than the “excellent liberating technique” that it was first advertised to be. Many good citizens were robbed of thousands of dollars by these hucksters.

Misinformed parents here in Chattanooga hired these men to kidnap their adult children to have them deprogrammed, urging them to go back to the empty lives they had left behind.<sup>5</sup>



*We were horrified when Rebecca was kidnapped for deprogramming.*

One parent, who was a detective, had a false charge filed against his daughter so that he could have her arrested. He then whisked her away to a remote place in Alabama to have her deprogrammed by Ted Patrick. He paid Patrick \$30,000! The deprogramming was unsuccessful, and the father ruined his relationship with his daughter for the rest of his life. The daughter’s account of all this is eye-opening.<sup>6</sup>

### Bad Press

Though most of these attempts at deprogramming were ultimately unsuccessful, the general public never heard the whole story. All they got from the press was propaganda put out by a newly formed anti-cult movement, designed to rob people of their freedom of religion and create an atmosphere of



“moral panic” in the general public.

The deprogrammings made front-page headlines in the *Chattanooga Times*.

Fear and suspicion spread like wildfire to the point that even the Christian colleges made the *Yellow Deli* off-limits for their students. The love and hospitality that had once been our trademark of serving the fruit of the Spirit was being viewed as an indication of something evil.

### Like the Salem Witch Trials

Sadly, it was mainly the religious leaders who promoted this type of fear and accusation, even speaking openly in the press about it, becoming mouthpieces for the anti-cult agenda, and attempting to alienate their congregations and student bodies from the loving people of the *Yellow Deli*. In a scene similar to the Salem Witch Trials, the accused were not given freedom to defend themselves. We went to a local church to listen to a young woman who had been invited to speak about her “deprogramming” from this dangerous “cult” by Ted Patrick. She began giving a very tainted and horrible-sounding account of our life in the Community.



*Your friends at the Deli in Dayton, Tennessee*

<sup>5</sup> See “The Twelve Tribes Communities, the Anti-Cult Movement, and Government’s Response,” <http://www.twelvetribes.org/controversies/social-justice.html>

<sup>6</sup> See “The Kidnapping of Rebecca Westbrooks,” <http://www.twelvetribes.org/controversies/kidnapping-westbrooks.html>

She tried to make the care we had for one another in our daily lives sound like something strange, something to be afraid of.

When we stood up to ask her about the confusing and untrue things she was saying, the deacons of the church literally dragged us out of the church and pushed us down the ten or so front steps of the church. Yes, we were thrown down the steps of the local church! We were stunned! Why were we being so violently rejected by our fellow Christians? Why were all these preachers listening to rumors and anti-cult propaganda and spreading this fear from the pulpit? Didn't they know that Proverbs 17:4 says, "An evildoer listens to wicked lips; and a liar gives heed to a destructive tongue"?

## The Areopagus

In spite of all this negative publicity the concept of the *Areopagus* began to form. Gene and Marsha had it in their hearts to provide a place for Christians, both clergy and laity, to come and address the problems in the church, and to find the remedy for the divisions that have been a stain and a plague to Christianity for centuries. They wanted to provide a place similar to the one spoken of in the Bible<sup>7</sup> where they allowed so-called "vain babblers" like the Apostle Paul to come and share



Live music and folk dancing was a common feature of the *Areopagus*.



"Salt"—David Jones, Bill Tiller, and Jay Howley had fun playing live music together in the *Areopagus*.

their latest new philosophy. In the Bible the place was called the *Areopagus*. Paul used this place of old to reveal to all the wise men and philosophers of his day the true God.

An old building just across from the Rose Garden in Warner Park became available, and so we set ourselves to a massive restoration project to make it into a unique place where everyone would feel welcome. We cherished the hope that this *Areopagus* on McCallie Avenue would be a catalyst to unite the Body of Christ in Chattanooga.

Unfortunately, this vision for unity was for the most part not embraced by the churches in Chattanooga. However, university students from Christian and non-Christian schools alike and many other citizens from around the area flocked to the *Areopagus*, in spite of the "off-limits" policies of some of the schools. The students and the general public loved the spirit there and wanted to find real answers to the real problems they saw in the church and in society. To most of them, the *Areopagus* was a wonderful place, and a handful of them

joined with us at that time. But it was not so with the leadership. The lack of interest we encountered from the local churches as a whole was a sad blow to us.

Prejudice and fear spread to the point that some workers at Provident hung a sign in the top floor windows that read "Cult Go Home!" When we saw this sign as we walked past their building on our way downtown, we understood our Savior's words in Luke 6:20 in the Phillips translation which reads, "*How happy you are when men hate you and turn you out of their company, when they slander you and detest all that you stand for because you are loyal to the Son of Man. Be glad when that happens and jump for joy. Your reward in heaven is magnificent, for that is exactly how their fathers treated the prophets.*" After the *Times* published a series of articles casting Gene Spriggs as a dangerous man, and the rest of the little band of *Yellow Deli* people



Dicky Cantrell putt-putting away in the *Yellow Deli's* delivery vehicle — a classic VW bus.

<sup>7</sup> Acts 17:19-33



# The Vine House & The Yellow Deli



as brainwashed abusers of children who were under the mind control of a dangerous cult leader, several of our leaders went to the newspaper to confront the reporter who wrote the article. The reporter made it clear that he was not interested in what we had to say! We were astonished to begin to realize that the press, the churches, and most of the administrations of the Christian colleges had been taken in by the “cult scare” of the '70s led by Ted Patrick, whose claims of “brainwashing” and “mind control” are now widely discredited.



*Allegations of child abuse were hard to take, since we loved our children dearly.*



*A typical Saturday meeting by Chickamauga Lake.*

At about the same time, our communal lifestyle began to solidify into a wonderful new little culture of sorts. No longer just a band of zealous single people working together with Gene and Marsha to help people, now we started having marriages and young families. Children were born and the young parents sought to “train them up in the way they should go”<sup>8</sup> as the Scriptures commanded. This included the clear biblical advice on spanking and good parenting practices. We were astonished to find that local social services did not agree with these biblical child-rearing practices, even calling it “child abuse.”

## Local Government Joins Forces with Church

Contrary to the U.S. Constitution that prohibits the state getting involved with church matters, it appears that the local government offices were somehow alerted that we were evil-doers. So, here began our first conflict with the local authorities, and our discomfort with being scrutinized by governmental workers who considered good citizens to be guilty without being given a proper hearing. They began to launch investigations into how we were raising our children, coming to our homes and demanding to examine them. The presses cranked out their unfounded

accusations, trying to vilify our good life with their character assassinations and slander. Simple old-fashioned child discipline was portrayed as horrendous child abuse.

Such inflammatory words caused many in Chattanooga to question their once-trusted friends from the *Yellow Deli*. “Had those nice people really gone mad and turned into religious cultists who hurt children?” Well, the accusations did not match with the daily life they had witnessed among us for the past several years, so many refused to listen to the slander. And all the negative publicity left us undaunted in our pursuit of that good biblical life

we hoped to restore to this planet. We knew that the biblical pattern of child raising would vindicate itself. And 20 years later, an article in *Time Magazine* revealed that most pediatricians approve of parents

spanking their children in certain situations.<sup>9</sup> “Time will tell,” the old saying goes. A decades-long decrease in spanking corresponds to a proportionate increase (not a decrease) in child abuse and antisocial behavior among children. (Gene Spriggs’ upcoming book, *When the Spanking Stopped, All Hell Broke Loose*, will tell the tale.)

It was at this time of trouble in Chattanooga that we met another great



*The Yellow Deli in Mentone, Alabama*

<sup>8</sup> Proverbs 22:6 <sup>9</sup> Michael D. Lemonick, “Spare the Rod? Maybe,” *Time Magazine*, August 25, 1997.

## Chattanooga: Do You Remember?



*In 1978, three couples were sent to establish a community in northern Vermont.*

crossroad in our lives, for even though our one little *Yellow Deli* on Brainerd Road had expanded to seven *Yellow Delis* in the towns surrounding Chattanooga, our financial success was not what we were seeking. The *Areopagus* was a success, bringing Christian music groups into town for live concerts, and often having live theatrics on the stage. But this kind of success was also not our goal. We must be free to live the life of the early church, which included training our children.

### The Violent Attack

At this point, we started going downtown at the noon hour and began to lift up our voice in the streets of Chattanooga. On one of these days, we were attacked by a Christian man and one of his friends at the corner of Eighth and Market Street. They were screaming



*We believed it was a biblical mandate to train our children at home, rather than sending them to public schools.*

accusations at us as the Christian began hitting one of our brothers in the head with his fists. A large crowd gathered as the police arrived. Was this America, the land of the free? But rather than being gently questioned about his well-being after this brutal attack, our brother was arrested and put into a police car. Oddly, the attacker was being released on his own recognizance, while three other brothers who were with the one who had been attacked got into the police car and off to jail they all went! Our brothers were held in jail overnight with a cold steel slab to sleep on and only an open toilet to share. The next day in court, our brothers told the judge what had happened, and said they wanted to forgive the attacker and drop any charges of assault against him. The wise judge saw the injustice of all that happened to our brothers and closed the case.

The attacker and other inflamed citizens

had been hoping to use this courtroom as a platform with the press to get their accusations on the six o'clock news, but forgiveness prevailed and everyone went home before the cameras could even start rolling!

### New Horizons

All this negative publicity did not hurt our restaurant business, but it dampened our desire to remain in a society that refused to let its people be free to live according to their conscience.

At this time, a young man from "up north" who had been attending Covenant College, began coming around the *Yellow Deli* when he heard it was "off-limits." He loved our spirit and became one of us. He told us of a group of believers in Vermont who were seeking to find a life of love like the one Jesus talked about in the gospels. He invited those folks to come to Chattanooga to visit us. They paid us a visit, participating in our life and greatly enjoying our *Yellow Deli* and *Areopagus*.



*The young man from "up north"*

They invited Gene and Marsha to come to Island Pond, Vermont, to help them begin the life they had witnessed in Chattanooga.

In May of 1978, the community at the Vine House gathered and laid hands on Gene and Marsha, along with two other couples, and sent them off to this remote village in northern Vermont. Once in New

England, it became increasingly clear that there was an open door for us. People were more liberal there, open to new ways of doing things, and still allowed personal freedoms that we were sadly losing at home in Chattanooga. Little by little we sold our properties in Chattanooga, closed all seven of the *Yellow Delis*, and bought houses in Island Pond, Vermont. We found a famous quote from George Whitefield, an evangelist from the "Great Awakening" in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: "If you want to take America for Christ, you have to take New England first." So, we would take America, and we would start in New England!



## The Vine House & The Yellow Deli



*Eddie Wiseman dishing out steaming hot tomato soup at the Vine House.*

### Our Pilgrim Forefathers

In New England, Gene and Marsha went to Plymouth Rock in Plymouth, Massachusetts, where the Pilgrims first landed. As they gazed at the famous rock, they prayed that whatever was from God in the spirit of the Pilgrims could still be fulfilled. There had to be religious freedom for a true movement of restoration to begin. Like the Pilgrims of old, this hope began to open up a whole new realm of understanding of who we were. For the original Pilgrim Separatists who landed in Plymouth in 1620 desired to restore what they called “the primitive pattern of the Word of God.” This pattern is described in Acts 2 and 4. They did not want to remain in

the apostasy of the Church of England, but desired to go back to the foundation of what the apostles taught in the beginning.<sup>10</sup> We took identity with the Separatists and realized that this was the heart that Gene and Marsha prayed would be preserved in us.

So, as you can see, your old friends, “the *Yellow Deli* people,” did not become just some off-beat Christian cult, but rather took on a much deeper hope. That hope is very similar to the one which burned in the hearts of those brave Pilgrims who we all revere so greatly as “foundation stones” of America. There are many people back in England who even today still consider what those Pilgrim Separatists did to be very wrong — separating as they did and fleeing to America for freedom of religion. It is God who will ultimately judge *that* debate.

The foundation that the Pilgrims attempted to lay, but ceased to build on, is the foundation we started building on in New England. It began from a preserved seed<sup>11</sup> that germinated here in Chattanooga, but sprouted in Island Pond, Vermont. From there our movement grew until we were sent out all over New England and then on to several countries around the world. Now we are often called the “Twelve Tribes Communities,” numbering about 50 communities in nine countries around the world.

Today, those of us from Chattanooga are coming back to bring a greater witness and a greater understanding of the Kingdom of God in these very



*The Vine Community was a wonderful place for young parents to raise a family.*



serious and important times we live in. The beginning ember of what we are now becoming was kindled in the *Yellow Deli* long ago. We are coming back filled with hope — hope for those who left us long ago, and for our friends who were drawn to the faint light in us and still hold fond memories of their times with us, and for those who we look forward to meeting for the first time. ✨

<sup>10</sup> Acts 2:42,44 <sup>11</sup> Romans 9:29



*Your friends from the Yellow Deli*

To Know Him  
is to  
Love Him

*I was only fourteen when the fascination started. He was the all-powerful King and I was the awkward youth. He could heal the sick, raise the dead, and shut the mouths of the trickiest lawyers. I was an un-athletic teenager, not particularly popular or clever, and couldn't do much of anything special. No matter what they did to Him, He always won. In fact, when they killed Him, He even rose from the dead. As for me, I always lost the argument, or the fight, and felt stupid for letting myself get drawn into the conflict.*

If someone had asked me the question, “Do you know Jesus?” — and lots of people did — I would have said yes. I had heard about Him ever since I was a little child praying, “God-is-great-God-is-good-let-us-thank-Him-for-our-food-in-Jesus'-name-amen.” After all, what more could there be to knowing Him besides hearing all the Bible stories and believing that He died for our sins?

When I was asked who my heroes were, I put Jesus at the top of the list. I was certainly not ashamed of Him and often made decisions by asking myself, “What would Jesus do?” many years before it became a popular catchphrase. I was as good a Christian as most people I knew, and a better one than some. I sincerely wanted to be like Jesus. Yet, according to the Bible, I was a liar.

Of course, I didn't know I was a liar. I didn't even know what the Bible said about it. I had other things to think about, like where I was going to go to college, and what kind of career I was going to pursue. But whatever I wound up doing, I had no doubt that I would do it as a Christian. My youthful fascination with the Lord would never leave me.

And it never did. It got submerged under a lot of other concerns, though, and it was years before it resurfaced. But then, due to some circumstances in

my life, I started reading the Word like I never had before, deeply desiring to know what God wanted me to do with my life. It happened to be the gospel of Luke that I was reading, and what I saw there shocked me. I guess I had read right over a lot of the things Jesus said, without really thinking about them before.

*“Woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for in the same way their fathers used to treat the false prophets.”* That was what He said in Luke 6:24-26, and it seemed as if He were talking about my Christian experience. Financial success had always been exalted,

and popularity, because as a rich or famous person I could “be used by the Lord.” But never had I been called on to do anything or say anything that would result in the sacrifice of my creature comforts or risk the disapproval of men. And never had I been warned that the comfort I had in my affluent life was all the comfort I would get for all eternity.

As I read on, I saw other disturbing words, like, “*Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?*” That was Luke 6:46, and it was followed by the parable of the man who built his house on the

*Never had I been warned that the comfort I had in my affluent life was all the comfort I would get for all eternity.*



ground without a foundation. That parable predicted ruin for me if I did not do what Jesus said. So where did I stand? Was I doing what He said? I suspected that I was lacking in that department, especially when I got to Luke 12:33: *“Sell your possessions and give to charity, make yourselves purses that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”*

Before that moment, I had never realized how radical the demands were that Jesus made on His followers. Of course, I had heard since I was a child that the apostles left their nets behind to follow Him, but the storyteller always made it seem like the kind of thing only apostles were supposed to do. In Luke 12, though, Jesus seemed to be talking to everyone, including me. So when I reached chapter 14, the effect was stunning: *“If anyone comes to Me,”* Jesus was saying, *“and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple... So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.”* (Luke 14: 26,27,33)

It was pretty clear. I hadn't become His disciple. I wasn't obeying His commands. I didn't even know what He meant by some of the things He said, but I knew that what He was talking about and what I was doing were two different things. What's more, nobody I knew

was doing the things He was talking about, either.

I was fascinated by Him, though, and I longed to know what He wanted of me. I was ready to do it, if I only knew how. I can't imagine going on for years with that longing and not being able to fulfill it. Of course, I realize that many people have probably experienced such frustration, maybe even some of you who are reading this article.



*Before that moment, I had never realized how radical the demands were that the Son of God made on His followers.*

But what happened to me was that I met a group of people who were living just like the early disciples and found out how the Master's words could actually be obeyed.

Other articles in this paper talk more about how our Master's words are practically applied in the daily life of a disciple. Please read them. But what I want to share with you was what I learned about His commands and what they had

to do with my salvation. You may remember me saying that, according to the Bible, I was a liar. Well, that's what is written in 1 John 2:4: *“He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”* Whenever I said, “Yes, I know Jesus,” it wasn't true, because I didn't even do what He said.

I realize that it might seem to some that I'm saying you have to earn your salvation by perfectly obeying everything Jesus commanded, which I'm not, but let's be honest: 1 John 2:4 is the Word of God. It's not going to go away. No matter how much we rationalize, it still says what it says. Only those who obey Him can truthfully say they know Him. And, according to Acts 5: 32, God gives the Holy Spirit only to those who obey Him. So how could anyone *know* that he had been saved — had passed out of death and into

life — if he wasn't obeying the commands of the Savior?

A lot of people *say* they know Him. I *said* I did. But I came to the place where I had to face reality. I didn't *know* Him. I didn't *know* that I had passed out of death and into life. How could I? 1 John 3:14 says that *“we know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren.”* And verse 16 defines love by saying, *“We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us...”* So I could only really *know* that I had been saved if I laid down my life for the brethren. I had to face the fact that my life was mostly centered around myself. I didn't lay down my life for anyone.

Now, we could quibble about words. I've talked to people who do.

They say, almost in exasperation, “Well then, nobody who is still alive could possibly be sure of salvation, not until they died on the cross for somebody else, just like Jesus did.” But really, our Master’s death on the cross was only the culmination of Him daily laying down His life. Everything He did was for our sake. And that’s what He calls His followers to do — live entirely for others.

If somebody wants to argue about it, they can, but I didn’t argue. I knew that I was lacking the definitive fruit of a disciple. I didn’t obey, and I didn’t love — not any more than any unsaved human being might do. I would be kind to people from time to time, letting people in line in front of me at the checkout if they only had one item and I had a whole basket full, and so on. But to live my whole life for others? How could I even do it? Become a medical missionary for the rest of my life? Maybe. But somehow, the original disciples found a way to love without traveling to Africa with a suitcase full of antibiotics. The Master commanded them to “love one another, just as I have loved you,” in John 13:34 and 15:12. He wouldn’t have said that if there wasn’t some way to do it.

It may be perfectly obvious to some people that the way it all works is to dwell together in community like the first disciples did. That way, you can “serve Him where He is” as He mentioned in John 12:26. Your brothers and sisters are always around, so you can always love them. You can always drop what you had planned and serve someone else. You can give your time, your energy, your resources, and so on,

to benefit “the brethren.”<sup>1</sup> But it wasn’t obvious to me. All I knew was that I was completely enthralled by the Son of God. I wanted to know Him. I wanted to belong to Him, heart and soul. And He said I had to deny myself. He said I had



*All I knew was that I was completely enthralled by the Son of God. I wanted to know Him. I wanted to belong to Him, heart and soul. And He said I had to deny myself.*

to hate anything that stood between me and Him. He said I had to carry my cross, and I really had no idea what that meant, but it didn’t sound like something I would naturally like doing.

Yet, still I wanted Him. The more I knew of what He required, the more I said in my heart, “Yes!” It *seemed* like I was in love with Him, but the true test would be whether I would actually *do* what He said. “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments,” He told us in John 14:15, and in verse 21, He said it again, “*He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves*

*Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him.*” I had His commands right there in my New Testament, but could He love me and reveal Himself to me, the way He was speaking of there?

So what it comes right down to is this: the greatest man who ever walked on earth, the very incarnation of the Creator, has spoken. The Savior of mankind, who loved us without reserve, all the way to the end, has made things very clear. He is so magnificent that we can truly say, “To know Him is to love Him.” But there is no true knowledge or real love of Him that does not produce obedience to His commands.

I guess that’s why, when I finally found a people doing what He said, I jumped at the chance to follow Him — not because the Bible said so, but because, to me, He was worth it. I wish everyone had that same fascination. Maybe if you read this and realize there is really a place on the earth where He is being obeyed, you will be encouraged and will abandon all for His sake. If you do, I’m sure you will never regret it. I *know* I haven’t. 🙏

*Robert*



**Robert Chambers**  
McCallie School, class of '69

<sup>1</sup> After all, what else could Ephesians 2:8-10 and 4:1-3 mean, other than deeds of love done in a life together?



# the BARRIER

*He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:13-14)*

For nearly three decades a great wall of concrete and razor wire divided East and West Berlin, a quite visible boundary between two opposing domains. West Berlin was a small island of relative freedom in the midst of a vast empire of tyranny. Millions of oppressed souls longed for the freedom of the West, but for most it was only an impossible dream. Still, a few courageous ones overcame almost insurmountable obstacles and escaped through tunnels under the wall, through which they had to crawl on their hands and knees. They could take nothing with them — only the clothes on their backs — but they were happy to leave everything behind for the hope of starting a new life.

Although only temporal, the example of the Berlin Wall can help us to “see” the unseen but very real barrier that separates the domain of darkness from the kingdom of light, and understand what it takes to get from one to the other.

## **The Domain of Darkness**

The whole world lies in the power of the evil one.<sup>1</sup> All men are born under his sway.<sup>2</sup> Although all men have a free will, and a conscience by

which they know good from evil,<sup>3</sup> they are alienated from God due to Adam’s sin and must strive to make their own way in this world.<sup>4</sup> Their ingrained insecurity and self-interest make

*Were it not for the conscience, human society would probably have ended long ago, but now the restraint of conscience has given way to the insatiable demands of self to the point that the very foundations of morality have all but crumbled.*

them easy prey for the evil prince of this world, whose chief occupation is to lead them astray.<sup>5</sup> Were it not for the conscience, human society would probably have ended long ago, but now the restraint of conscience has given way to the insatiable demands of self to the point that the very foundations of morality have all but crumbled.<sup>6</sup>

Such is the nature of this world.

It runs on the engine of self-interest. The souls of men — their intellect, will, and emotions — are consumed with their own needs and desires, with advancing their own careers, causes, and reputations, and with maintaining and building up the systems of this world order.<sup>7</sup> Their conflicting desires and ambitions are the cause of immeasurable human misery and the looming destruction of the very planet they grudgingly share. Their eyes cannot see any way out of the cycle of sin and death they are trapped in. Even their religion does not set them free, but only comforts them in their prison. They sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.<sup>8</sup>

## **The Kingdom of Light**

Onto the battered landscape of human history walked an ordinary-looking Man with an extraordinary message:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18-19)*

<sup>1</sup> 1 John 5:19 <sup>2</sup> Ephesians 2:2 <sup>3</sup> Genesis 3:22 <sup>4</sup> Genesis 3:17-19 <sup>5</sup> Revelation 12:9 <sup>6</sup> Psalm 12:1 <sup>7</sup> 1 John 2:16 <sup>8</sup> Luke 1:79



From the day that He severed Himself in baptism from the fallen religious system of His day,<sup>9</sup> He spoke of nothing but the *gospel of the kingdom*.<sup>10</sup> He filled His disciples and all who would listen with the vision of a new social order based on love — the direct opposite of the self-interest that fuels the domain of darkness. For by *love* He did not mean merely an emotion, but rather the deliberate activation of one's will to seek the welfare of another without regard for one's own benefit or loss.<sup>11</sup> He did not envision occasional heroic deeds of love adorning the typical routines of life in this world. He lived and died to bring about a whole society of people who take no thought for themselves,<sup>12</sup> but spend their lives

*The barrier that holds men captive in the domain of darkness, although invisible, is every bit as real as was the Berlin Wall. Instead of concrete and wire, it is woven of fear, shame, insecurity, intimidation, anxiety, peer pressure, emotional attachments, pride, and countless worldly entanglements.*

every day serving one another. That is what He meant by seeking first the kingdom of God.

Yahshua\* had absolutely no expectation of this new social order filling the earth in this age. He did not commission His disciples to make the world a better place by infiltrating the world's society, industry, or government.<sup>13</sup> On the contrary, He called them to come out of that fallen system,<sup>14</sup> even at the cost of their family ties,<sup>15</sup> in order to follow Him. Together they would form a "city" set on a hill; together they would be a light to the world around them.<sup>16</sup> Their "cities" (communities) would be islands of refuge in the midst of a world in bondage to the evil one<sup>17</sup> — a foretaste of the fullness of



<sup>9</sup> Matthew 3:1-15 <sup>10</sup> References in the Gospels for "gospel of the kingdom" and "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" are too numerous to cite, which makes it all the more striking that today's fallen religious system avoids the topic entirely. <sup>11</sup> Luke 9:23-24 <sup>12</sup> Matthew 6:31-33 <sup>13</sup> 2 Timothy 2:4 <sup>14</sup> John 15:19; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 <sup>15</sup> Matthew 10:34-39; Mark 10:29-30 \*Yahshua is the Hebrew name for Jesus. See page 62 for an in-depth explanation.



Messiah's kingdom that will fill the whole earth in the next age when the evil one is bound.<sup>18</sup>

However, that foretaste of the coming kingdom could not come about until the Messiah had died as a ransom for all<sup>19</sup> and risen from the dead and ascended to His Father in heaven. Then His Spirit could be released to fill the waiting disciples and empower them to do everything the Master had taught them about the kingdom of God.<sup>20</sup> It is no accident that the very first thing that happened when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them was that they spoke the gospel of the kingdom with boldness, and three thousand men responded to the call to "be saved from this perverse generation" by utterly forsaking their old lives to live a common life together.<sup>21</sup> It was the normal and only fitting response to the good news of the One who had died to ransom them from the clutches of the evil one and his dark domain. Their common life of love and unity was the witness of the kingdom<sup>22</sup> — the evidence that He was actually ruling in their midst.<sup>23</sup>

### The Barrier between the Kingdoms

Although the book of Acts tells this story in only a few sentences, each of those 3000 men had to overcome his own personal obstacles to surrendering his life. There were many wives and children, parents and siblings, farms and businesses, employees, possessions, and debts to be considered. Probably not all of their families and friends were overjoyed at the decisions they made that day to give up everything to follow this resurrected Messiah who could only be seen in His people. It took great courage for those men to walk

out the confessions of faith they made that day, at any cost.<sup>24</sup>

The barrier that holds men captive in the domain of darkness, although invisible, is every bit as real as was the Berlin Wall. Instead of concrete and wire, it is woven of fear, shame, insecurity, intimidation, anxiety, peer pressure, emotional attachments, pride, and countless worldly entanglements. When someone is truly weary of his servitude to the evil prince of this world and the weight of his

*There is no toll gate at the entrance to the kingdom of light. The abundant life of the Son of God is freely given. But just like that tunnel under the Berlin Wall, the way of escape that leads to the kingdom is narrow and difficult, and few are they who even find it.*

own guilt, and hears the voice of the Righteous One through His servants, and is drawn to the light emanating from their camp, he or she will inevitably come face-to-face with this barrier. All manner of obstacles will bar the way — an unwilling spouse, rebellious children, financial responsibilities, the pleas, promises, threats, and warnings of family and friends... The tentacles of the unseen realm of darkness will reach out through every earthly tie to tighten their grip on any who dare attempt escape.

It is not that the blood of the Son of God was insufficient to pay the ransom for all, but all are not willing to do His will.<sup>25</sup> All are not thirsty enough to overcome every obstacle that keeps them from drinking the water of life:

*I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and sexually immoral and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death. (Revelation 21:6-8)*

Those who are too cowardly to overcome the obstacles betray the fact of their unbelief. Preferring the pitiful comforts of their captivity,<sup>26</sup> they show contempt for the blood that was shed for them and become guilty of it, classing themselves as the worst of criminals.<sup>27</sup>

There is no toll gate at the entrance to the kingdom of light. The abundant life of the Son of God is freely given. But just like that tunnel under the Berlin Wall, the way of escape that leads to the kingdom is narrow and difficult, and few are they who even find it.<sup>28</sup> Nothing of the old life can pass through it, which is why only those who hate their life in this world will be able to make the passage.<sup>29</sup> They are the only ones who will be united with Him in the likeness of His death, and serve Him where He is.

*For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. (Romans 6:5-7)* ☞

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 5:14-16 The Master was addressing His disciples collectively, not as independent individuals. The word "you" in Matthew 5:14 is plural, while the words "light" and "city" are singular. <sup>17</sup> Philippians 2:15 <sup>18</sup> Revelation 20:1-3 <sup>19</sup> 1 Timothy 2:6 <sup>20</sup> Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:3; John 14:26; 7:37-39 <sup>21</sup> Acts 2:40-47 <sup>22</sup> Matthew 24:14 <sup>23</sup> Even today, wherever He is truly being made Lord, the same common life will prove it. <sup>24</sup> Matthew 10:34-39 <sup>25</sup> John 7:17; Hebrews 5:9; Acts 5:32 <sup>26</sup> Luke 6:24 <sup>27</sup> Matthew 11:23-24 <sup>28</sup> Matthew 7:13-14 <sup>29</sup> John 12:25-26

# Amazing Grace

Grace... faith... works... such common words, but what do they mean? What is grace, and how does it work? What is faith, and where does it come from? Where does it lead? What are the works that cannot

save us, and the works we are saved to do? And for that matter, what is salvation, anyway? In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul was not preaching the gospel, but rather giving the disciples understanding about what had happened to them and what lay ahead of them — the process and the purpose of salvation. The *gospel* is found in the Gospels. The letters of Paul and the other apostles consist of instruction and correction for those who are already in salvation.<sup>1</sup> That is why we must look to the Gospels to find the foundation of these familiar terms Paul uses in his letters.

There is a process or a progression involved in salvation, and in the Gospels and the book of Acts there are many examples of people going through that process, or in some cases stopping short of salvation.

## Grace

First comes *grace*, the unmerited favor of God. As it relates to salvation, grace is the working of God in a person's life to protect him, prepare him, and bring him to the time and place where he can hear the gospel from someone who has been sent with the authority to proclaim it.<sup>2</sup>

It was grace to Peter that he had fished all night without catching anything, and that he happened to be cleaning his nets in that particular place where the Master wanted to teach that day, and that the Master chose his boat to speak from.<sup>3</sup> It was grace that caused the Master to pass by the sycamore tree where Zacchaeus was waiting, and to notice and call to him.<sup>4</sup> It was grace that caused the Ethiopian eunuch to happen

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

*(Ephesians 2:8-10)*

to be passing near Philip and to be reading the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, and it was grace that caused Philip to hear from the Spirit the urging to approach the chariot and ask the eunuch whether

he understood what he was reading.<sup>5</sup> And it was even grace to the “rich young ruler” that the Master came to teach in his town.<sup>6</sup>

So grace brings a person near in order to hear the good news. But what happens next depends on the one who speaks and the one who hears.

## Faith

Faith is *persuasion*. That is true both in the natural and the spiritual realm. A natural man can be persuaded in his mind to do many things, and it is a sort of faith, but the faith that saves is the persuasion of the Holy Spirit which comes to a person as he hears the gospel. As Paul said, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”<sup>7</sup> But as Paul also labored to explain, the word of God must be spoken by a flesh-and-blood person who is “sent”<sup>8</sup> — that is, someone who has the spiritual authority to proclaim the gospel. The only thing that gives a person that spiritual authority is that he has obeyed the gospel himself and is living the life that it demands.<sup>9</sup>

So grace draws a person near to hear, and then through hearing the gospel from a true disciple, faith comes — but not automatically. It requires something very important, and very rare, on the part of the hearer: he must be willing to do the Father's will.<sup>10</sup> He must have ears to hear, which means a heart to obey.<sup>11</sup> Otherwise he will not submit to the spiritual authority of the one speaking; he will not receive him as coming from God.<sup>12</sup> He will not be persuaded, for he is in the grip of a stronger persuasion — the fear of losing his own life.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is ironic that most of the popular “plans of salvation” make little use of the Gospels and much improper use of Paul's letters. As a result, very few people have actually heard and obeyed the gospel. <sup>2</sup> John 7:17-18 <sup>3</sup> Luke 5:1-10 <sup>4</sup> Luke 19:2-10 <sup>5</sup> Acts 8:27-39 <sup>6</sup> Mark 10:17-30 <sup>7</sup> Romans 10:17 <sup>8</sup> Romans 10:14-15; Matt 10:40; John 13:20. There is not a single example in the New Testament of a person receiving the Holy Spirit without receiving a flesh-and-blood person filled with the Holy Spirit. So it is peculiar, to say the least, that most Christians believe that a person can become a disciple by simply reading a tract and saying a prayer, all by himself. <sup>9</sup> John 7:18b; Otherwise he is living a lie and can only pass on the same deceptive spirit he is in communion with, according to John 7:18a; 2 Corinthians 4:2; 1 John 2:4; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15. <sup>10</sup> John 7:17 <sup>11</sup> Matt 13:9,15; Luke 14:26-35 <sup>12</sup> Matt 10:40; John 13:20 <sup>13</sup> Hebrews 2:15; Luke 9:24; John 12:25; Rev 21:7-8



That is what happened in the case of the “rich young ruler” who came asking what he must do to inherit eternal life:

*Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.” But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*

(Mark 10:21-22)

Although there was abundant grace at work, bringing him into the very presence of the Master, he did not receive faith from hearing the gospel, but rather dread and gloom, for he was not willing to give up his own life, in order to receive the eternal life that Yahshua offered him. He loved his life in this world.

But in the case of the 3,000 on the day of Pentecost, we see a very different story. The *many other words*<sup>14</sup> they heard that day from Peter evidently imparted faith to them, for it says they “gladly received his word.”<sup>15</sup> Gloom did not descend on them at the thought of giving up their lives, for they were fully persuaded that this Messiah was worth dying for. Thus they were baptized into His death and received the same Spirit that had filled the ones who spoke the good news to them.<sup>16</sup>

### Belief that Impels Obedience

The *faith* that came to those 3,000 caused them to believe in their hearts in this Messiah whom they had crucified,<sup>17</sup> that He had paid for their sins through His death, and that He had risen from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father. And what happened next? Did they all go their separate ways, having added a new dimension to their lives? No. The message they heard called them to be saved from the perverse generation they were living in.<sup>18</sup> The Bible doesn’t record the “many other words” Peter spoke to them that day,

but we do know what the Master had commanded the apostles to do in the preaching of the gospel, which surely they were careful to obey:

*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20)*

And what was the first thing the Master had commanded them when He called them to follow Him? It was to forsake everything.<sup>19</sup> And lest we think that requirement applied only to the apostles, remember that after the woman broke her alabaster jar, her most precious possession, and poured out every drop of the fragrant oil upon Him, He instructed His disciples:

*I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her. (Matthew 26:13)*

It is doubtful that Peter would have forgotten to include this story in his *many other words*, considering how deeply it had affected the disciples the day it happened.<sup>20</sup> But regardless of the exact words Peter may have spoken, the outcome speaks for itself:

*All the believers were together and had all things in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:44-47)*

It was neither a coincidence nor a misunderstanding that those 3,000 new disciples all gave up everything, including their independent lives, and shared a common life together.<sup>21</sup> Their belief *impelled*<sup>22</sup> obedience to what they heard. It was not merely a mental assent to the fact of Yahshua’s death

and resurrection. It was a total identification with Him and His people that cut them off from all past loyalties and occupations.

There is a belief that doesn’t impel obedience. The Master encountered this kind of belief on several occasions, such as:<sup>23</sup>

*Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man’s testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man. (John 2:23-25)*

The words “believed” and “entrust” in this passage are actually the same word in the Greek manuscript. You could well say that they believed in Him but He didn’t believe in them, for He knew it was only a belief in their minds and not in their hearts. They admired Him, but He knew they would not obey Him at all costs, therefore He could not entrust His Holy Spirit to them.<sup>24</sup>

So the faith that saves produces a belief that obeys; otherwise it is not saving faith. That is exactly what the writer of James was laboring to express:

*Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” You believe that God is one? You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? (James 2:17-20)*

Sadly, many are so foolish as to be unwilling to recognize the futility of a faith that does not result in the works that followed the first preaching of the gospel in Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-37. But the Master said that those who have ears to hear will bear abundant fruit — thirty, six-

<sup>14</sup> Acts 2:40 <sup>15</sup> Acts 2:41 <sup>16</sup> Acts 2:38 (NKJV); Rom 6:2-5 <sup>17</sup> Acts 2:36 <sup>18</sup> Acts 2:40 <sup>19</sup> Mark 10:28; Luke 5:1-11; Luke 14:33 <sup>20</sup> Matthew 26:8,14-16 <sup>21</sup> Acts 4:32-35; 5:20 <sup>22</sup> *Impel* means to urge, constrain, or motivate a person to an action; to cause to move forward with force. <sup>23</sup> John 8:30-44 is another vivid example of vain belief. <sup>24</sup> Acts 5:32; Hebrews 5:9 <sup>25</sup> Matthew 13:3-9; John 15:8; John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:14-18

ty, or a hundredfold — and so *prove* to be His disciples.<sup>25</sup>

### Works

Certainly, there are no works that a person can do to earn his salvation in Messiah. All of his good deeds have no more value than filthy rags in the currency of redemption.<sup>26</sup> It is only Messiah's worth that counts — the infinite value of His blood which He shed on our behalf.

In fact, anyone who really understands the futility of his own unredeemed life, with all the material manifestations of his own selfish works,<sup>27</sup> will be eager to abandon it all as soon as he discovers the pearl of great price.<sup>28</sup> It would not even enter the mind of someone who truly hates his own life in this world<sup>29</sup> that giving up his possessions in order to gain eternal life<sup>30</sup> could be considered “works salvation.” He would be like Paul, who wrote,

*Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish,<sup>31</sup> in order that I may gain Christ. (Philippians 3:8)*

Paul understood in the very core of his being what he was saved from and what he was saved for. The “loss of all things” was part of the reality of his old life being buried with Messiah in baptism,<sup>32</sup> not a “good work” that he did to earn his salvation.<sup>33</sup> Paul was glad to be free of his old life, career, and possessions so that he could lay hold of that for which Messiah had laid hold of him.<sup>34</sup> That is the revelation he had that caused him to write to the Ephesians,

*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

*(Ephesians 2:10)*

The word translated as *works* here

(and in verse 9, for that matter) actually means *employment* or *occupation*. It is not speaking of isolated good deeds that one does from time to time, but rather the direction of one's will<sup>35</sup> — what he does with his time, energy, skills, and strength. Everyone who is saved is saved for the purpose of spending the rest of his life employing his gifts<sup>36</sup> to build up the Body of Messiah:

*The amazing thing about grace is that it brings about the purpose of God on the earth through willing human beings who receive faith when they hear the word of God, which causes them to believe to the point that they actually obey His commandments.*

*“From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by that which every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their minds. (Ephesians 4:16-17)*

Paul and the other apostles did not conceive of the Body of Messiah as a mystical union of isolated believers who live their own independent lives all week (“walk as the Gentiles walk”), and get together for an hour or two on Sunday. It was to be a full-time, visible demonstration of disciples

living together in unity,<sup>37</sup> loving one another just as their Master had loved His first disciples<sup>38</sup> — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week — serving one another according to their gifts and abilities. Such people do not need to be concerned about what they will eat or what they will wear,<sup>39</sup> but can actually seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, knowing that all their needs will be met through the “effective working of every part” for the benefit of the whole. Such is the miracle of self-sacrificing love.<sup>40</sup>

*If you love Me, keep My commandments.*

*(John 14:15)*

*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. (John 14:21)*

*He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.*

*(1 John 2:4-5)*

It is impossible to obey His commandments on your own. **It takes a community.** That is where the love of God is perfected in us — where we can truly love one another. That is where God has commanded the blessing of eternal life.<sup>41</sup>

### Amazing Grace

The amazing thing about *grace* is that it brings about the purpose of God on the earth through willing human beings who receive *faith* when they hear the word of God, which causes them to *believe* to the point that they actually *obey* His commandments.<sup>42</sup> Together they bear the fruit of the kingdom<sup>43</sup> — the life that bears witness to the fact that the Father actually sent His Son,<sup>44</sup> because as He is, so also are they in this world.<sup>45</sup> ☩

<sup>26</sup> Isaiah 64:6 <sup>27</sup> Even if those past works looked good to the natural man, as in Titus 3:5. <sup>28</sup> Matthew 13:44-46 <sup>29</sup> John 12:25 <sup>30</sup> Mark 10:28-30; Luke 14:33 <sup>31</sup> The Greek word Paul used here means something worthless and detestable, such as the excrement of animals. <sup>32</sup> Romans 6:4-7 <sup>33</sup> Titus 3:5 <sup>34</sup> Philippians 3:12 <sup>35</sup> See the article *Friends & Enemies* on p. 43, for more on this theme. <sup>36</sup> His “calling” or employment in the Body of Messiah, Ephesians 4:1. <sup>37</sup> John 17:20-23 <sup>38</sup> John 13:34-35; 15:12-14 <sup>39</sup> Matthew 6:31-33 <sup>40</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 <sup>41</sup> Psalm 133:1-3 <sup>42</sup> John 14:15,21; Rev 22:14 (KJV, NKJV) <sup>43</sup> Matthew 21:43 <sup>44</sup> John 17:23 <sup>45</sup> 1 John 4:17



# A People for His Own Possession

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a **people** for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)*

As a Bible-believing Christian, I never had the awareness or the sense of being part of “a people.” The hope of becoming part of a *people* was never included in the presentation of the Gospel that I or any of my Christian friends received. Of course, there was a conceptual sense of subscribing to a belief system, by asserting that I believed in the virgin birth, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, His humanity and divinity, His imminent return, and the hope of being raptured. Once I had satisfied this checklist, I was approved for fellowship in certain Christian circles.

But how deep is that fellowship? How connected is it? In my experience, the contact was only as long as the Sunday service, or the duration of the rally. Afterwards we all went home and pursued our own careers, completely disconnected from any collective or joint purpose having to do with building up the Body of Christ together.

The primary goal of the Christian part of my life was to get other people saved and into a Bible-believing Church. The goal of the other part of my life, which occupied most of my time and energy, was to become as successful and comfortable in life as my own abilities could enable me to be. I was completely oblivious to what being part of a *people* might be. But how important is this to God? Doesn't

He desire the reality of a *people*?

He delivered *His people* Israel out of Egypt. They came out intact as a *people*, with traditions and a culture. They were to be the model for the whole world of what a *people* should be like — those who acknowledge the Creator as their God. Interestingly, when you take a closer look *all* the Scriptures are addressed to a *people*, not to isolated individuals.

I didn't learn this in my former church. Are you learning this in your church?

So, what does being a *people* have to do with Jesus? Everything!

No one other than a *people* can proclaim the praises of the One who saved them, as it says in 1 Peter 2:9-10. Verse 10 says, “Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God...”

Is that really true in your experience? Are you conscious of it? After joining your church, was there ever a point in time where it was clear and evident to you that you had become part of a *people*? That was never my experience during the entire ten years that I faithfully went to church and graduated from Bible school. I read the verses many times, but there was no practical reality that I could cling to and acknowledge that what I was a part of could truly be called a *people*.

Everyone has a national identity — American, German, Italian, etc. — but those have nothing to do with proclaiming His excellencies. Everyone has a nationality, but not everyone is part of *His people*.

Everyone has one or more racial or ethnic identities, and within that

identity some have a certain sense of belonging. But racial identity does not in itself form a *people* for God's own possession.

God wants a *people*. He wants a people who will be His own special possession.<sup>1</sup> In fact, they will be His very own creation, as is prophesied in the Psalms:

*Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a **people yet to be created** may praise the LORD. (Psalm 102:18)*

They will be the result of His forgiveness, through the sacrifice of the One...

*“...who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a **people for His own possession** who are zealous for good works. (Titus 2:14)*

What the apostles warned the first believers against and fought against is the very thing we find ourselves in the midst of today: the total loss of identity as a *people*, and the confusion that results from that loss.

When the first believers heard the gospel, they were saved because they responded appropriately to what they heard:

*Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized 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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.” And with*

*many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this perverse generation." (Acts 2:37-40)*

Consider the context: Peter was addressing Jews gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. The "perverse generation" Peter was speaking of was the fallen religious system of their day. If you read a little farther, you will see that those who were pierced to the heart by the message they heard didn't merely add a new religious dimension to their lives. They utterly abandoned their old lives in the fallen religious culture of their day, and so formed *a people*.

Have things changed for the better since their day? Of course not. So the call to be saved from this perverse generation is even more urgent today.

What do you envision when you hear that someone was saved from a fire, from drowning, or from a tyrannical ruler? One consistent thing you see is that the person is removed from the danger. In most cases it was accomplished with the help of others rather than his own efforts. He is removed from the dangerous situation and put in a place of safety. There is a movement from point A to point B.

Did that happen when they heard the gospel in the book of Acts? Yes.

Did that happen when you heard the gospel?

Those three thousand people in Acts 2:41 came from every conceivable background and experience.<sup>3</sup> They had their own plans for their lives in their own cities or countries. They had set their own priorities in life, just as everyone else does — just as you do, and just as I did.

But Peter's preaching of the gospel brought to light God's priorities as opposed to their own — so much so that all those people saw the difference and were stopped in their tracks.<sup>4</sup>

They really wanted to do God's will,<sup>5</sup> but they hadn't understood what that will was, nor how to do it. That's why they asked, "What must we do?" Why didn't they know? They were all there for the feast of Pentecost. They were being taught by the priests of Israel. That they didn't know God's will and purpose for His people is a clear indictment of the failures of the religious system and teachings of that day.

Just as Jesus had said, it was the blind leading the blind.<sup>6</sup> But the gospel opened the eyes of a few, exposing the futility of what they had learned and were practicing. It was a perverse generation because they claimed to be God's people but were not obeying His commands, not caring for the poor in their land. The widows and the orphans were being completely neglected. People were offering blind and lame animals for sacrifice,<sup>7</sup> which they bought in the Temple courts, instead of the best of their own flocks and herds. Little wonder that they even failed to recognize the Lamb of God Himself, to which all the animal sacrifices looked forward for their fulfillment.

The sincere ones who were willing to do God's will were lost in the confusion of the fallen religion of Judaism. This is what the term *Babylon* denotes. Babylon is the confusion of dead, rote religion that permeates everything and every place outside of the true commonwealth of Israel.<sup>8</sup> Was the nation of Israel a commonwealth in that day? No, but according to their law they were supposed to be.<sup>9</sup>

A *commonwealth* is a people who are devoted to the common good through a voluntary sharing of mutual prosperity within a nation or a political body. As a Christian, I certainly didn't see the church as a commonwealth, although according to Ephesians 2:12-13, that is what I was supposed to have been brought into by the blood of Christ.

My church was not a commonwealth. Is your church?

Those first believers responded to the gospel in a most significant way. They began to share all their possessions. They became a commonwealth. They had everything in common.<sup>10</sup> They were happy to live this way. What had never been done in Israel<sup>11</sup> was finally being done by those disciples in the early church. There were no poor among them. This was the beginning of the restoration of His people, as they were beginning to function as *a people*, as the royal priesthood and holy nation they were always supposed to be.<sup>12</sup> They were a true commonwealth, sharing all their wealth in common.

My church never imagined doing anything like that. Does yours?

What those people and the apostles did in Acts was the foundation and pattern for the church for all times.<sup>13</sup> They were completely united in one heart and soul, and one purse,<sup>14</sup> and God was pleased with them.<sup>15</sup> Great grace comes only from Him when He is pleased. This is what it means to be *a people*. They gave up everything in obedience to the gospel,<sup>16</sup> and God was pleased.<sup>17</sup> Only in such a place, with such a people, does God command the blessing of life everlasting:

*Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! ... For there the LORD has commanded the blessing — life everlasting. (Psalm 133:1-3)*

Does this describe your church?

I'm so thankful that I am now part of such *a people*. You're welcome to come and see for yourself.

*John Stringer, III*



<sup>1</sup> Exodus 19:5-6; 1 Peter 2:9 <sup>2</sup> Why will this people need to be *redeemed*? It was no great mystery why I still needed to be redeemed. Even though I supposedly had been "born again," the things that were ravaging my conscience and personality were taking me to destruction. Perhaps you find yourself captive to your flesh in the same way I was, being driven to despair and desperation. You may have the doctrine, but are miserably unable to produce or experience the reality of it. Herein lies the problem, and the futility. <sup>3</sup> Acts 2:8-11 <sup>4</sup> Acts 2:37 <sup>5</sup> John 7:17 <sup>6</sup> Matt 15:14; Isaiah 42:19 <sup>7</sup> Malachi 1:8; John 2:14-16 <sup>8</sup> Ephesians 2:12 <sup>9</sup> Deut 15:4,7-11 (NASB, NIV) <sup>10</sup> Acts 2:37-47; 4:32-37 <sup>11</sup> Nehemiah 9:34 <sup>12</sup> Exodus 19:5-6; 1 Peter 2:9-10 <sup>13</sup> 1 Thess 2:14 <sup>14</sup> Acts 4:32 <sup>15</sup> Acts 4:33 <sup>16</sup> Luke 14:33; Mark 10:28-30 <sup>17</sup> Romans 9:25; Matt 21:43





*Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. (Jude 1:3)*

# The SHIFT from *Community Life* to *Doctrine*

After the first century, right doctrine became the litmus test for faith instead of loving as Christ commanded.<sup>1</sup> Late in the first century, Jude urged the believers to *contend* for the faith delivered once for all to the saints. This word *faith* meant the persuasion to do what Christ commanded, for this was the purpose for the faith the 3000 received by hearing the gospel on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:36-45.<sup>2</sup>

*Faith* in Jude 1:3 meant persuasion from God to do His will, which first came to the saints by hearing the gospel. But today the word *faith* in Jude 1:3 is taken to simply mean the knowledge and assent to religious truths, without regard to good works, which is therefore a false faith.<sup>3</sup>

The only assurance of faith is Ephesians 2:10 and 4:16 — doing the good works one was saved to do in order to build up the Body. Jude 1:3 has nothing whatsoever to do with doctrinal correctness, as the context in verse 4 proves. It speaks of grace being turned into license to do your own thing, doing what is right in one's own eyes, since there was no longer authority from God to be adhered to.<sup>4</sup> There was no restraint; each one did whatever he wanted, but still maintained a form of godliness, although denying its power.<sup>5</sup>

Doctrine, or the right theology, requires no *faith* to believe.<sup>6</sup> Faith is for the purpose of doing the works prepared for one to do

in the Body of Christ, the Community. Theology requires no faith, but John 13:34-35 does require faith:

*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

1 John 3:16 and 23 also require faith, without which even someone with the right doctrine won't pass the litmus test of 1 John 3:14 — regardless of whether he says he believes.<sup>7</sup> So, believing the right doctrine requires no faith, no love, and no laying down of one's life for his brothers.

*“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” (Romans 12:1-2)*



**The church turned from being the persecuted to being the persecutor.**

No one can do Romans 12:1 unless he obeys verse 2 by faith as well. Otherwise, the faith of Jude 1:3 is considered merely doctrine, the theology of theologians, learned men who can quote many scripture verses, but laying down their lives as 1 Jn 3:16 says is far from them. They can only teach their

<sup>1</sup> John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:14,16,23; 5:12-13 <sup>2</sup> Romans 10:17 <sup>3</sup> James 2:14-26 <sup>4</sup> Judges 17:6; 21:25 <sup>5</sup> 2 Timothy 3:1-5 <sup>6</sup> James 2:19 <sup>7</sup> John 5:24

flocks the same “faith” as they have. A student, when fully trained, will be like his teacher. So their empty “faith” has been passed down ever since theological Bible schools have existed on earth. They have no relationship with the true Messiah<sup>8</sup> and can only give mental assent to theological terms, concepts, and decrees thought up by the apostates of the fourth century.<sup>9</sup>

These apostate leaders valued doctrine higher than love and ended up persecuting people, deposing bishops, and banishing into exile those considered to have the wrong doctrine. Ultimately, they started killing those they deemed heretics. So why is it always those with the right doctrine who end up killing those with the wrong doctrine? They obviously didn’t understand 1 Cor 1:10 in the right spirit. You can’t force unity. Forced unity is not the right spirit. As 2 Cor 11:4,13-15 clearly states, only Satan’s servants or ministers could ever do what the Christian theologians did to dissenters. All this was in absolute violation of the Master’s words to leave them alone, to let them be.<sup>10</sup>

The reason Jude so urgently said to *contend* for the faith that was imparted in the beginning was because of a change he saw coming in — away from the pattern in Acts 2 & 4 and toward what would become the state church of Constantine. We can see the change in the way Christians thought, being persuaded and influenced by a different spirit, propagated by a different gospel, and ending up with a different Jesus from the one they accepted in the beginning.<sup>11</sup>

The church turned from being the *persecuted* to being



the *persecutor*. By that time, the Holy Spirit had long ago left the church.<sup>12</sup> No longer could anyone truthfully confess 1 John 4:2-3 or John 12:26 from his experience, but only from his mind. As the church declined in its love in every place,<sup>13</sup> in spite of Paul’s exhortation to them in Ephesians 6:24, none seemed to be able to pass the litmus test of 1 John 5:13. This was because 1 John 3:16 and 23 were no longer the emphasis, but rather mental assent to a list of doctrines now called “the faith.” So this doctrinal “faith” replaced the works true faith was meant to energize, as James later wrote in the second century.<sup>14</sup>

So as the church careened down its fatal decline, the emphasis shifted to doctrine, which is now called or considered “faith.” But Jude, who wrote by the end of the first century, looking into the second, urged that they *contend* or have a vigorous defense of the faith delivered once and for all to God’s people. What he meant by this was the faith that produced the expression of the abundant life recorded in Acts 2 & 4. That was “the faith once for all delivered to the saints.”<sup>15</sup> Faith came to those who had ears to hear.<sup>16</sup>

But after love left, the Holy Spirit left. Eventually those who were as John 9:41 describes took the word *contend* in Jude 1:3 to mean taking up arms to force their “right doctrine” upon those with “wrong doctrine” under pain of death. This was contrary to the words of the true Messiah, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight.”<sup>17</sup>

Jude wrote to the few who were not yet disqualified:

<sup>8</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:4,15 <sup>9</sup> See <http://theblackboxspeaks.org/church-councils.html> <sup>10</sup> John 12:47-48; Luke 9:54-55, NKJV; Acts 5:34-39 <sup>11</sup> Galatians 1:6-7 <sup>12</sup> Revelation 2:4-5 <sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:2 <sup>14</sup> James 1:26-27; 2:14-26 <sup>15</sup> Acts 2:44-45 <sup>16</sup> Acts 2:40; John 18:37; 10:27 <sup>17</sup> John 18:36



To those who are called, sanctified (set apart) in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. (Jude 1:1-2)

It was addressed to those who were *still* set apart by God the Father, and kept, preserved for Messiah. May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you, who are *sanctified* as in 1 Corinthians 1:2 — those separated from the world in the Body of Messiah, the Community, as in Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-37. They are set apart in a place where the refining process can take place in each one's life, which cannot be accomplished unless one is separated from fellowship with the world in that place where Messiah actually is in His Body.<sup>18</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 1:2, "in every place" means in every township, just as the letters from Paul were addressed to each community according to its particular town or locality. Starting from Jerusalem, the first community swarmed to surrounding towns in Judea,<sup>19</sup> after which Paul patterned his communities. Of course, it was "with persecutions," as Mark 10:29-30 promises. This is the mark of those who have separated themselves in a place in which they can be made pure as 1 John 3:1-3, "that they may see Him as He is, and everyone who has this hope in them purifies himself as He is pure."<sup>20</sup>

Mark 10:29-30 was Christ's answer to His disciples' question, "Who then can be saved?"<sup>21</sup> So verse 27 explains how one is saved by obedience to His gospel. Someone has to receive the faith to not only believe in Him, but to do what He required of all whom He would save from this present evil world and put into a place where they could be purified — where He is.<sup>22</sup> There,

## Like a Little Child

Have you ever heard it said that anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it?<sup>1</sup> Only such humility recognizes that Yahshua\* the Messiah meant everything that He said.<sup>2</sup> This childlike obedience produced the abundant life of the early church.<sup>3</sup> This is the common unity and love that Yahshua prayed for in John 17:20-23, which is the witness to the world that His Father sent Him. All the things that He said constitute the only recipe that produces His kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven.<sup>4</sup>

Only a proud person would dare to reason away what He said as if He did not really mean it, or it wasn't important, or it doesn't apply to His kingdom. Such a person will never enter His kingdom unless he humbles himself and becomes like a little child. His kingdom here on earth is very simply the place where His people do everything His way. And when you find that place, then you find Him.

<sup>1</sup> Luke 18:17 <sup>2</sup> Matthew 7:24-27 <sup>3</sup> Matthew 28:20; Acts 2:44; 4:32 <sup>4</sup> Matthew 6:10 \*Yahshua is the Hebrew name for Jesus. See page 62.

and only there, can anyone serve Him. As 1 Corinthians 1:2 implies, it must be a set-apart place that is in the world, but not of it.<sup>23</sup> But this takes a community in a town.

The word *sanctify* in John 17:17 is the same as in 1 Corinthians 1:2 — set apart from the evil world system to be made ready (prepared) to rule with Messiah; and John 17:18 is their mission.

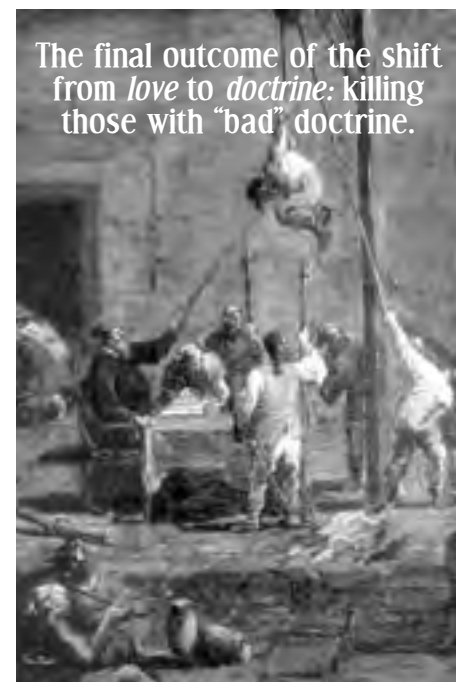
As John 17:19 says, Christ had to sanctify Himself, not that He had to be made pure, but He meant to set Himself apart from all other things in order to purify His disciples through the truth of His word — to be made pure as 1 John 3:1-3. The sanctification process<sup>24</sup> cannot be accomplished without someone being set apart in a particular place (a township or locality) where the work of sanctification can be accomplished in his life.<sup>25</sup> *Sanctification*, as in 1 Thessalonians 4:3 and 7, is the resultant state befitting those who are *sanctified* as in 1 Corinthians 1:2.

So for someone to walk down the aisle in the Billy Graham Crusade and be "saved" is impossible, for he goes back home and does the very same things as before, except now

supposedly he's going to heaven when he dies. But has he simply believed in vain, as those in John 2:23-25? Was it only make believe? Might as well make believe you love Him, as to say you do, but not obey Him.<sup>26</sup> But this is not what Christ told His disciples they had to do to be saved in Mark 10:17-30.

"Who then can be saved?" Only those who hear and obey the gospel, including the "many other words" (the "hard sayings" of Christ) as in Acts 2:36-41 and Mark 10:17-30. The "rich young ruler" wanted to know what he had to do to be saved. The answer is the same now as it was for

the 3,000 on the day of Pentecost, who gave up everything in response to the first message of salvation to be preached after the Messiah ascended, in obedience to His commission.<sup>27</sup> Ask yourself why the preaching of the gospel doesn't produce the same results today. Could it be a different gospel?<sup>28</sup> 📌



The final outcome of the shift from *love* to *doctrine*: killing those with "bad" doctrine.

<sup>18</sup> John 12:26 <sup>19</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:14 <sup>20</sup> Romans 5:3-5; 2 Peter 1:4-11; 1 Peter 5:4 <sup>21</sup> Mark 10:26 <sup>22</sup> John 12:25-26 <sup>23</sup> John 17:14-17 <sup>24</sup> Revelation 19:7-8 <sup>25</sup> Colossians 1:28,23 <sup>26</sup> John 14:15,21; 1 John 2:4 <sup>27</sup> Matthew 28:19-20 <sup>28</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:4

# Is Anything Required of a Disciple?

## Does salvation by grace through faith release the believer from obeying the commandments?

- ⊙ *If so, then why did Jesus and His apostles emphasize them?*
- ⊙ *If not, then what are the consequences for not obeying them?*

It is not a question of whether a believer can lose his salvation. Once a person is sealed with the Holy Spirit, it is irrevocable:

*In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)*

But the same apostle who wrote that comforting passage also passionately expressed this desire:

*...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own.*

*(Philippians 3:10-12)*

In the Apostle Paul's mind, there was a goal that required tremendous effort on his part to reach, and to which he had not yet attained, and which he could fail to attain. What was the resurrection he had to strive for? Are not all believers resurrected at Messiah's coming, unless they are alive when He returns?

*Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and*

*holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with Him for a thousand years.*

*(Revelation 20:4-6)*

Clearly, Paul understood that reigning with Christ during His millennial kingdom on the earth was not a foregone conclusion for a believer, but depended on how one lived his life in this age. It was possible to be among "the rest of the dead" who did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This possibility of being disqualified to rule with Him is mentioned in many places in the New Testament. For example:

*And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, He has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. (Colossians 1:21-23)*

What if you *don't* continue in the faith, stable and steadfast? Will you still be blameless and above reproach before Him?

*"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." (Revelation 2:11)*

What if you *don't* overcome? Will you be "hurt" by the second death? What does it mean to be "hurt" by the second death?

*"You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white,*

*for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels." (Revelation 3:4-5)*

What if you *have* defiled your garments? Will you *still* walk with Him in white? Will you *still* be worthy? If you *don't* overcome, will your name *remain* in the Book of Life — the register of those who are counted worthy to rule with Him?

*So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him. (Hebrews 9:28)*

What if you are *not* eagerly waiting for Him?

*For, "Yet a little while, and the coming One will come and will not delay; but My righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him." (Hebrews 10:37-38)*

Evidently it is possible for one of His righteous ones (to whom He imputed His righteousness when they first believed) to be among those who shrink back when He returns. Let's back up a few verses to see how this is possible:

*For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. (v. 36)*

What if you *don't* do the will of God? What if you *lack* endurance? Will you *still* receive what is promised?

*Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. (v. 35)*

How can you throw away your confidence? And if you do, what will be your reward?



For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Verses 30-31)

Who are "His people" who are judged and fall into the hands of the living God?

*How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? (Verse 29)*

How does one *spurn* the Son of God or *profane* the blood of the covenant or *outrage* the Spirit of grace? Is this talking about *believers*?

*For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment... (Verses 26-27)*

Have you received the knowledge of the truth? What if you go on sinning deliberately?

*For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then fall away, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding Him up to public shame. (Hebrews 6:4-6)*

What does it mean to "fall away" or to hold the Savior up to public shame? What becomes *impossible*? Will such a one be "hurt" by the second death? What is the second death? Did you know there are actually *two* distinct types of "second deaths" mentioned in the scriptures? The second death for unbelievers we all know about — eternity spent in the lake of fire.<sup>1</sup> But the second death for *disciples* — which will be for the foolish virgins only<sup>2</sup> — is to miss the millennial kingdom rule of Messiah on the earth. These foolish virgins will spend a thousand years in death to pay

for their unconfessed sins. They did not give themselves to purification in this age and so their souls were not saved from death.<sup>3</sup> They are unable to be presented to their King as whole and complete and so will miss out on the kingdom age.<sup>4</sup>

*Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. (James 1:21)*

What if you *don't* put aside all filthiness and wickedness? What if the standards of His word do *not* become part of your very nature, as expressed in your behavior? What will happen to your soul?

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*What if you don't keep  
His commandments?  
Do you still love Him?  
Will He still reveal  
Himself to you? Or will  
you be shown to be a liar?*

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*For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal<sup>5</sup> kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:5-11)*

What if you *don't* add virtue<sup>6</sup> and self-control to your faith? What if you *don't* diligently increase in steadfastness

and godliness and love? Will entrance into the Kingdom *still* be richly provided to you?

*Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him. (James 1:12)*

What if you *don't* remain steadfast? Will you *still* receive the crown of life? If you *don't* stand the test, what is the proof that you love Him?

*"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. Whoever has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and reveal Myself to him."*  
(John 14:15,21)

What if you *don't* keep His commandments? Do you still love Him? Will He still reveal Himself to you? Or will you be shown to be a liar?

*Whoever says "I know Him" but does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. (1 John 2:4)*  
Is the truth in you?

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death and into life." (John 5:24)*

Have you passed out of death and into life? How can you be sure?

*We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. (1 John 3:14)*

Do you love the brothers? How do you know?

*By this we know love: that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. (1 John 3:16)*

What does it mean to lay down your life for your brothers?

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word, he will never see death." (John 8:51)*

What if you *don't* keep His word? Will you see death? ☛

<sup>1</sup> Revelation 20:14,15 <sup>2</sup>This is graphically illustrated in the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13 <sup>3</sup>James 5:19-20 <sup>4</sup>James 1:4 <sup>5</sup>This word actually means *age-lasting*, that is, the kingdom of the millennial age. <sup>6</sup> *virtue* — behavior showing high moral standards.

# Contradictions

## **Hear, O Israel!**

*The LORD our God, the LORD is one.  
You shall love the LORD your God with  
all your heart, with all your soul and  
with all your strength.  
(Deuteronomy 6:4-5)*

**I**t is hard to live with contradictions. They gnaw at your soul, wearing you down until you either face them squarely, admit your hypocrisy, and change, or you silence your nagging conscience and become a cynical, beaten wreck of a human being.

Such was the crossroads I found myself at about fifteen years ago. I had a challenging and lucrative career as a consultant on the cutting edge of the computer graphics industry. I was respected as a Christian leader and Bible teacher. I had a wonderful, faithful, capable wife who home-schooled our four sweet daughters. We were living in one of the most beautiful places in the world, waking up every morning to the breathtaking panorama of Lake Geneva and the Swiss Alps. I was miserable.

In my heart I wanted to serve the God of Heaven; in my soul I was fighting a losing battle with my flesh; with my strength I was building up the kingdoms of this world. I was doing the very thing the Apostle Paul said not to do, “No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.”<sup>1</sup> My life was a living contradiction. I could not obey the most basic commandment to love God with all my heart, all my soul, and all my strength.

## **With All Your Heart**

Didn't I love Him with all my heart? I thought so. After all, I had given my life to Him the best I knew how. I prayed, studied the Bible,



taught Sunday School, and paid my tithes. What is love for God anyway? That question always led me to John's gospel and letters, which gave me no comfort...

*“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” (John 14:15)*

*“Whoever has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me...” (John 14:21)*

*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” (John 13:34)*

*By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:16-18)*

Lay down my life for my brothers? I couldn't honestly claim to be doing that in any practical way. See my brothers in need? I only saw them for a couple of hours on Sunday, wearing their Sunday best. I didn't even know *where* most of them lived, let alone *how* they lived. How would I know whether they needed anything? How could I love them just as Jesus had loved His disciples? And if I could not do that, then how could I obey His commandments? And if I did not

obey His commandments, then according to the Scriptures I did not love Him with all my heart. I was living a lie:

*Whoever says, “I know Him,” but does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.  
(1 John 2:4)*

## **With All Your Soul**

As for my soul, well, there was no way to get *all* of it to do much of anything. The soul, I'm told, consists of the mind, the will, and the emotions. My mind was easy to get moving... in almost any direction. It took every bit of my will to keep my mind from plunging me into ruin, much less focusing my faculties consistently on godly things. And my emotions were rather reluctant to respond to anything with much passion, including the call to worship. Oh, I could sing hymns with the best of them, but whatever feelings they may have stirred up returned to their placid state moments after the last chord rumbled out of the organ. As much as my heart wanted my soul to be on fire for the Lord, it wouldn't cooperate.

## **With All Your Strength**

Alas, here was the most formidable of obstacles to sainthood! What was I doing with the bulk of my energy, and the best years of my life? Making money to sustain my comfortable, upper-middle-class lifestyle by selling my skills to the highest bidder. At the time in question, that entailed developing software for financial analysts in private Swiss banks to better manage the fortunes of the richest men on earth. Where did their wealth come from? I dared not ask, nor would I have been told. But I did wonder. Drug lords? Slumlords?

<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 2:4 — See p. 38, *Good Soldiers for Christ*, for an in-depth study on this passage.



Gangsters? Terrorists? Rock stars? Pimps? Whose kingdoms were getting the benefit of my strength? One thing was for sure: it wasn't God's kingdom.

### The Crossroad

So there I was, saved and going to heaven, or so I was told. Oh, I had said the "Sinner's Prayer" fourteen years earlier, and no one would have guessed that there was any doubt in my mind about my eternal destiny. But what part of me was saved? Was it just my heart that was saved? That was the only part that seemed to be oriented in the right direction. But if my soul and my strength couldn't follow my heart, what good was it? Or was the commandment in Deuteronomy 6:5 only for the Old Covenant, and now in the New Covenant it was okay to just ask Jesus into your heart and live your life much the same as other decent people who make no claim to be Christians?<sup>2</sup>

In the midst of my turmoil, I happened to stumble upon some disciples who were living a common life together just like you can read about in Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-37. It was almost as if I had entered a time warp and landed back in the first century. The simple purity and devotion of their life shed light on the contradictions of my life

and made it all too clear what was missing. At this crossroad my life took a radically different direction, releasing me from the grip of this present evil age and freeing me to give my whole heart, soul, and strength to build God's kingdom.

I have written of how I came to this crossroad and what happened next in another article, which you can read on our web site.<sup>3</sup> But now I would like to tell you what I have learned that eliminated the contradiction I had lived with for so many years.

### The Salvation of the Whole Man

The Apostle Paul seemed to have a more holistic view of salvation than most Christians have today, as this passage implies:

*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*(1 Thessalonians 5:23)*

Somehow it seemed important to Paul that the whole person — spirit, soul, and body (heart, soul, and strength) — would be completely devoted to God. In fact, the word translated *sanctify*<sup>4</sup> in this verse means "to set apart from common or profane things and dedicate to God." And there is a related word that Paul used a few verses earlier:

*For this is the will of God, your sanctification... for God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. (1 Thessalonians 4:3,7)*

The word translated *sanctification*<sup>5</sup> (and also *holiness*) in this passage means the *effect* of being set apart — the purification of heart and life. Therefore, *sanctification* (being made pure and blameless) can only happen as a result of being *sanctified* (set apart from the common and profane). Paul puts it together in his second letter to the Corinthians:

*"Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them," says the Lord, "and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me," says the Lord Almighty. Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.*

*(2 Corinthians 6:17 - 7:1)*

### Where Salvation Happens

Obviously, to the Apostle Paul, salvation was not just a matter of saying the "Sinner's Prayer" and going to heaven when you die. The promise of being called God's sons and daughters was based on obedience to the call to come out



<sup>2</sup> Regardless of what the Savior Himself said in Matthew 22:37... <sup>3</sup> <http://www.twelvetribe.org/publications/one-mans-journey.html>

<sup>4</sup> #37 in *Strong's Concordance* <sup>5</sup> #38 in *Strong's Concordance*

## Contradictions

of the fallen society and into the set-apart, undefiled place where He can *father* us — give us the care, protection, training, and discipline that children need to grow up right.<sup>6</sup> Paul was actually calling the wayward Corinthians back to the foundation he had established them on — a community of disciples who lived a set-apart life together, just like the first community in Jerusalem.

That is the way Paul addressed his first letter to the Corinthians:

*To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours. (1 Corinthians 1:2)*

He was writing to those who were “*set apart in Christ*” (not “*by Christ*” but “*in Christ*”). He meant *in the Body of Christ*, which to him was not an ethereal<sup>7</sup> concept but the *corporeal*<sup>8</sup> expression of the life of Christ in a particular place where all the saints<sup>9</sup> call upon the same Lord. That is, they are all coordinated in all their actions under one head, just like a physical human body.<sup>10</sup> That is how the church was first established in Jerusalem, setting a definitive pattern that was replicated through Judea. In fact, Paul makes explicit reference to his churches’ adherence to the Judean pattern in his letter to the Thessalonians:

*For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews. (1 Thessalonians 2:14)*

It was the radical, set-apart, holy life that they shared together that brought the persecution upon the Thessalonian church, just as it had upon the churches in Judea, because it exposed the shallow, self-centered, idolatrous lifestyle of the fallen

culture they had come out of. They upset the social order of their day,<sup>11</sup> just as their Master had said would be the effect of the gospel:<sup>12</sup>

*“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” (John 15:18-19)*

***The gospel Paul preached was the same as the gospel he obeyed — one that caused him to suffer the loss of all things,<sup>13</sup> turning his back forever on his former life and occupation to be immersed into Messiah’s Body.***

### **The Gospel of Salvation**

And that brings us to the crux of the matter. The gospel Paul preached was the same as the gospel he obeyed — one that caused him to suffer the loss of all things,<sup>13</sup> turning his back forever on his former life and occupation to be immersed into Messiah’s Body. It was the same gospel as Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, which caused the 3000 to utterly abandon their old lives and band together, sharing all things in common out of their love for one another. And it was the same gospel that the Savior Himself preached, calling the original twelve disciples to leave everything in order to follow Him, creating an intimate brotherhood in which they experienced salvation night and day.

All these disciples had died the same death to their old lives,<sup>14</sup> giving up everything in obedience to the gospel<sup>15</sup> (the very thing the “rich young ruler” would *not* do<sup>16</sup>). They all had to leave one place and

go to another<sup>17</sup> where they could lay down their lives for one another every day,<sup>18</sup> loving one another just as their Savior had loved them. This is the gospel that creates community, because it actually calls and delivers people out of the domain of darkness where they live by and for themselves, and into the kingdom of the Son,<sup>19</sup> the commonwealth of Israel,<sup>20</sup> where they can serve Him where He is.<sup>21</sup>

Wherever the Spirit and the Bride are, they say, “Come!”<sup>22</sup> Come to the place where Messiah lives in His people, where all who believe are together and have all things in common.<sup>23</sup> There everyone is cared for through the miracle of self-sacrificing love. No one needs to be concerned about meeting his own needs,<sup>24</sup> because he has a hundred brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers, just as the Master promised,<sup>25</sup> who look out for him while he is busy looking out for them. Each one is free to use his gifts and the grace supplied to him to do the works he was saved to do<sup>26</sup> for the purpose of building up the Body of Messiah,<sup>27</sup> not his own kingdom or the kingdoms of this world. And in the process, each one is purified through the difficulties and circumstance of their life together, as their hurtful ways are exposed and healed in the safe environment of love.

Only there is it possible to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.

*David*



<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 4:11-16 <sup>7</sup> *ethereal* — characterized by insubstantiality; as impalpable or intangible as air. <sup>8</sup> *corporeal* — having material or physical form or substance. <sup>9</sup> *Saints* means set-apart ones. <sup>10</sup> In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 Paul labors this point. <sup>11</sup> Acts 17:6 <sup>12</sup> Matthew 10:34-37 <sup>13</sup> Philippians 3:8 <sup>14</sup> John 12:24-26 <sup>15</sup> Luke 14:26-33; Mark 10:28-30 <sup>16</sup> Mark 10:21-22 <sup>17</sup> Matthew 4:19-20; 8:22; 9:9; Mark 10:21 <sup>18</sup> Luke 9:23; 1 John 3:16; Hebrews 3:13 <sup>19</sup> Colossians 1:13 <sup>20</sup> Ephesians 2:12 <sup>21</sup> John 12:26 <sup>22</sup> Revelation 22:17 <sup>23</sup> Acts 2:44 <sup>24</sup> Matthew 6:31-33 <sup>25</sup> Mark 10:29-30 <sup>26</sup> Ephesians 2:10 <sup>27</sup> Ephesians 4:11-16



# THE STIRRING OF THE HEART



There is nothing more exciting for a true believer than to look back in the scriptures and see how prophecy was fulfilled. It gives credence to God and His witness. One of the most exciting fulfillments of prophecy recorded in the Old Testament is that of the Jews leaving Babylon and returning to rebuild Jerusalem. This was to fulfill the words of Jeremiah the prophet:

*When the seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. (Jeremiah 29:10)*

What a wonderful time to live in! The Babylonian captivity was about to end and Abraham's offspring were about to go back to their homeland and rebuild the temple. This is what they had longed for, hoped for, and waited for.

*Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel — He is the God who is in Jerusalem. (Ezra 1:2-3)*

You would have thought that the response to this call by King Cyrus would be overwhelming. However, it wasn't at all. Although they were in a foreign land, with foreign customs and gods, most did not want to leave. According to the ancient historian Josephus, they had become quite prosperous in Babylon and most of them did not relish the idea of

leaving all and starting all over in a desolate land.

So although a few did return, the majority did not.<sup>1</sup> They had grown comfortable in Babylon, in spite of the many commandments from their God not to mix with other cultures. They had become successful in business, owned property, accumulated possessions, some amassing great wealth. Why, when they were beginning to do so well in society, did God want them to up and leave? Did He really mean to leave everything — even family members, if they were unwilling to come? All they had to return to was a desolate wasteland full of wild animals and rubble. Surely He did not expect them to abandon all they had gained for that! What kind of witness would it be if they were so irrational as to suddenly leave their jobs, possessions, friends, and family to return to Jerusalem?

These questions must have reverberated in many of their minds as heard the call. This was no time to leave.

Perhaps they would be able to make Babylon into a better place. Besides, they had built synagogues and a very respectable religious establishment in Babylon. Perhaps they could influence their society politically and financially and change things for the better.

Oddly enough, upon reading this intriguing story in the Bible, we find that God actually *did* want them to leave. It was their prophetic destiny. No one today would actually argue that it was *not* God's will that the Jews in Babylon leave everything and return to rebuild Jerusalem.

So, how is this ancient story in the Bible relevant today? Part of the answer lies in the response of those who *did* leave Babylon. Ezra 1:5 identifies



**Rebuilding Jerusalem was no easy task**

<sup>1</sup> See *Only 42,000?* on following page

## Only 42,000?

In Ezra 2:64, it says of those exiles returning to Jerusalem, “The whole assembly numbered 42,360.” Forty-two thousand initially sounds like a lot of people, enough to fill a medium-sized stadium. However, the fact that there were *over a million* Jews in Babylon at that time brings the number into proper perspective.

Usually, the words *only* or *merely*, when inserted in italics by Bible translators, are diluting words, used to reduce the impact, or qualify what was written.<sup>1</sup> However, in this case, either word could rightly have been inserted by the translators in this verse. It may as well have read, “The whole assembly numbered *only* 42,360.” *Only* forty-two thousand had their hearts stirred as Ezra 1:5 describes. *Only* forty-two thousand returned to Jerusalem. That’s *barely* 4% of the total number of Jews living in Babylon at that time.

Why did so few return to their ancestral homeland? The Jewish historian Josephus recorded that most of them were “loath to leave” due to the homes, possessions, and security they had achieved during their 70 years of captivity.<sup>2</sup> Many had achieved status and even great wealth during their stay in the prosperous Babylonian capital. In fact, most were downright comfortable — so comfortable, in fact, that they may well have sneered or groaned when the call came to return to their land and rebuild the temple.

By their response, it was clear that their comfort was what really mattered to most of the ones who stayed behind.

<sup>1</sup> Such as in Philippians 2:4 (compare the New Revised Standard Version with most other translations). <sup>2</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 11.1.3.

them as those “whose heart was stirred by God.” They were the ones who responded to the call. Something was awakened in their hearts by the prophetic voice to return to Jerusalem after seventy years. This was a once-in-a-lifetime chance to hear and obey. It is what many had lived their lives in anticipation of. They did not want to settle for a comfortable life in Babylon. They knew God wanted more than that. These people set their face like flint to return and rebuild. It was like another exodus.

The stirring of the heart to go and rebuild can be compared to the stirring of the heart to hear Christ’s message and follow Him — setting one’s face like flint to rebuild the Kingdom and not look back. Looking at the gospel of Christ, it is not difficult to see the parallel between His call to leave everything to follow Him and what God called the Jews in Babylon to do. Many of the Jews in Babylon thought it was unreasonable to expect them to leave everything behind, even unwilling family members, and many people today think the same way about Christ’s call to forsake everything,

including unwilling family members, to follow Him.

It is very similar in America today to how it was in Babylon: people are quite comfortable in their living conditions, careers, schools, and social circles. They’ve accumulated property and possessions. Many are doing “quite well” in the world today. But what if the

call came from God to abandon all that in order to follow Christ and build His kingdom? Would their hearts be stirred to obey? Or would they rather stay and live out their days in Babylon?

To build up His kingdom and to build up the world are two entirely different things. Christ said, “My kingdom is not of this world.”<sup>2</sup> In fact, the world is an entirely different kingdom and is ruled by a different king.

*Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, “All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.” (Luke 4:5-6)*

*We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. (1 John 5:19)*

We also know that anyone who is of the truth hears His voice and follows Him.<sup>3</sup> Anyone who is unable to hear His voice is still under the sway of the ruler of this world. If someone wants to follow Him and build up the Kingdom of God, then he must change kingdoms and allegiances. He must leave Babylon (the world) in order to build up Jerusalem (His kingdom).

*For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to*



<sup>2</sup> John 18:36 <sup>3</sup> John 18:37



the kingdom of His beloved Son.  
(Colossians 1:13)

*I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. (John 17:15-16)*

*If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, **but I chose you out of the world**, therefore the world hates you. (John 15:18-19)*

The gospel of Jesus Christ called men to leave everything behind and follow Him. They could not stay where they were and build — they had to get up and follow after Him. They could have no other allegiances. The response by those first disciples when they heard His message validates this:

*And He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” **Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.** Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. **Immediately they left the boat***

## The Foundation of the Gospel

What if Abraham had decided that he could be a believer without obeying what God told him to do? He would have been no different from the Jews who remained in Babylon. They were told they had to leave Babylon to go back and restore the land God gave to Abraham... but most didn't. Or he would have been like the Jews in our Master's day who were told by John the Baptist that they had to leave the religious system to be ready to follow Messiah... but most clung to it. Or he would have been like the Christians today who are assimilated into the modern-day “Babylon” of this world. Their only journey is down the aisle to say the sinner's prayer, only to return to the same place, the same job, the same environment, and just go to church on Sunday. Abraham had to *leave* his secure life behind, *enter* into the land God was calling him to, and *become* what God wanted him to be. All those who have the faith of Abraham will do what Abraham did. (John 8:39)

*and their father, and followed Him. (Matthew 4:19-22)*

*Peter began to say to Him, “**Behold, we have left everything and followed You.**” Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.” (Mark 10:28-30)*

The first disciples did not think it was unreasonable for Him to expect them to leave everything, even

unwilling family members, and follow Him. In addition, Christ did not think it unusual that they did this, nor did He say it was unnecessary when Peter exclaimed that they had left everything to follow Him. This was the normal response to His gospel.

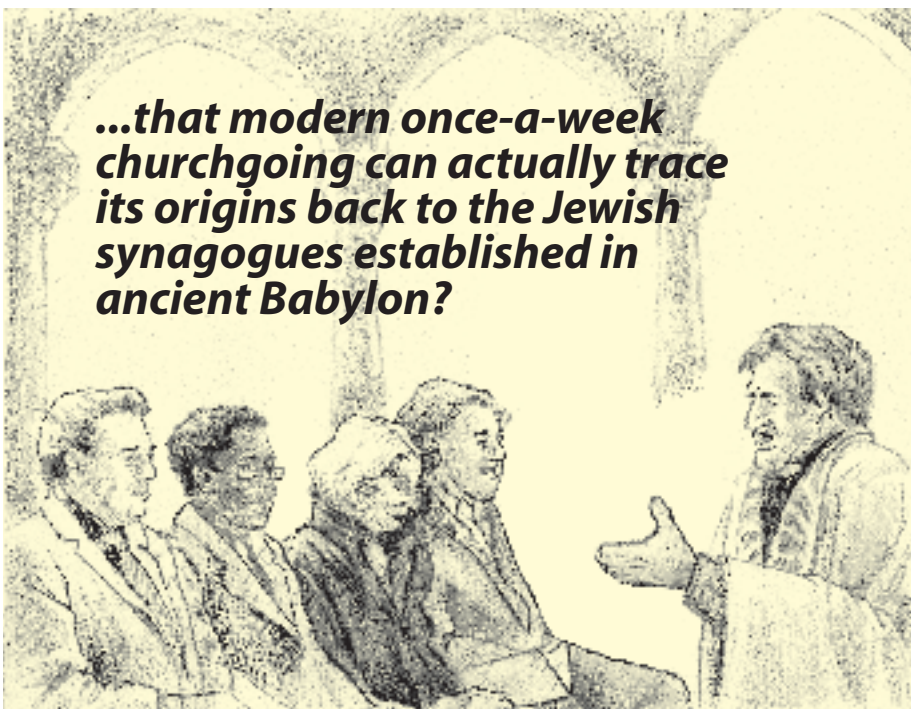
Those first disciples had to face the same hardships that those who left Babylon did; they had to leave behind those who weren't stirred in their heart.<sup>4</sup> They had to leave behind parents, children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters — whoever was not stirred to go and build what God was building.<sup>5</sup>

Even Abraham, the first one God called, had to leave behind his family, his country, and his father's house and go to the land God would show him.<sup>6</sup> He left one place and went to another place. He was called out by the same voice:

*And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. (Revelation 22:17)*

The word *come* denotes motion from one place to another.<sup>7</sup> The very same essential requirement that Abraham had when he was called by God is present in all the Gospels — movement from one place to another. The first step in obeying the gospel is to leave one place in order to go to another place — a new place and environment. When a person is born again he receives a brand new heart and is immersed into

**...that modern once-a-week churchgoing can actually trace its origins back to the Jewish synagogues established in ancient Babylon?**



<sup>4</sup> Matthew 10:34-35,37; 12:46-47 <sup>5</sup> Luke 14:26

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 12:1 <sup>7</sup> John 6:44 <sup>8</sup> Genesis 12:1-2

## The Stirring of the Heart

the brand new culture of the Body of Christ — he does not remain in the culture of the world.

Abraham had to leave his land,<sup>8</sup> turn his back on his previous life, and obey what God was calling him to do. He had to do this before God could show him all the other things he would do

through him.<sup>9</sup> Abraham did not shrink back even though he was commanded to leave his life in this world behind him, turning his back on his family and friends and the world he had known. He said his farewells, kissed his loved ones good-bye forever, and placed his life in the hands of the One who

spoke to him saying, “Leave your life, your family and friends, your job and security. Trust me and I will take care of you.”<sup>10</sup> Those who are Abraham’s seed will have Abraham’s faith and will do what Abraham did.<sup>11</sup> 🌱

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 11:8 <sup>10</sup> Matthew 6:31-33 <sup>11</sup> Galatians 3:7,29; John 8:39; Romans 4:12

Shhh... listen for a moment:

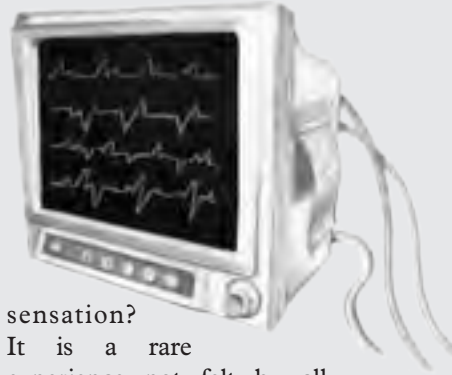
*lub-dub, lub-dub*

Can you hear it? Put your hand to your heart — just about at the center of your chest. Can you feel your heart beating? The first organ formed, it begins beating after just three weeks. As an adult, on the average your heart valves are opening and closing 75 times per minute. Its tempo rises and falls with the swells of the tides of life — sometimes it beats faster, sometimes slower.

Your heart beats about 100,000 times in a single day and about 40 million times in a year. During your lifetime, your heart will beat more than 2.5 billion times. The heart works hard, even at rest — twice as hard as the leg muscles of a person sprinting. Your six quarts of blood are being circulated throughout your body three times every minute. In a single day, your blood travels over 12,000 miles (four times the distance across the United States from coast to coast). During your lifetime, your heart will have pumped the equivalent of one million barrels of blood — enough to fill more than three oil supertankers. The heart truly is an amazing muscle. It beats, without stopping, for an entire lifetime. Your circumstances and surroundings may change, yet still the heart beats regularly, steadily, without conscious control or notice on your part.

Sometimes, though, you become consciously and acutely aware of your own heart beating. It may be an unfamiliar or unpleasant sensation. Your pulse is quickened, but it is not caused by excessive exercise or stress or strong emotion. Your heart pounds, seemingly about to burst in your chest cavity, the heartbeat echoing in your ears. What is that arrhythmic, fluttering

## The Beating of a Heart



sensation?

It is a rare experience not felt by all. Something is tugging on your heart strings. Your heart is being stirred up, not by any natural cause, but by a greater power. You are being roused to action.

Down through the centuries, men have experienced this tug upon the heart as they have groped for God. A man named Abram felt it on a clear, starry night as he stood looking up toward the heavens in the middle of ancient Mesopotamia. Some of his descendants felt it in the wilderness outside of Egypt as they prepared the tabernacle of worship for the God of Israel. A relative few again felt it when their time of captivity in Babylon was at an end as they returned to rebuild the temple and walls of Jerusalem.

Five hundred years after that, a Man came with an uncompromising message of love that demanded complete surrender and trust from the heart. A few whose hearts were simple and tender enough to be stirred by His message left behind everything and followed Him. Others, mostly of the ruling religious establishment, hardened their hearts and plotted to have this kind, gentle Man killed.

After His torturous execution, some returned to the city, beating their chests

— a physical expression of what was happening within their hearts. After His triumphant resurrection and victory over death, His followers preached the message of a new life, and three thousand of their countrymen were pierced to the heart. Recognizing the guilt they shared in that innocent Man’s death, they were immersed, being washed of their guilt and reborn into a new life.

Such was the beginning of the most vibrant, heart-warming community life of togetherness. Yet after the span of only forty or fifty years, their once-bright light flickered and eventually was snuffed out. The heartbeat could no longer be found.

About thirty years ago in the height of the Jesus Movement, it was a time when many were seeking to be rid of stale religious rote. Many people’s hearts were stirred then, and Christian communities were springing up all around the country. But when the dust settled, most only ended up back in the pews.

It was at that time when a very sensitive couple was stirred up to love God with all their hearts. That kind of love couldn’t be contained — it demanded to be shared. So they opened up their home to others who had the same desire to pour out love on each other. Since then, that life has been growing and spreading out to many new places all across the world.

Is your heart being stirred by the things you are reading in this paper? If so, what will you do about it? If your heart is stirred up, but you don’t follow its inclination, why is it beating anyway? Please follow its leading. Come and build the New Jerusalem with us, where God is working in this present time. That’s the kind of heart He’s after. 🌱



# LEAVE, ENTER, BECOME

## Abraham, Circa 2000 BC

Thousands of years ago, God found a man who was completely willing to do His will. His heart was longing for something greater than the life he was living. Then one day he heard a voice speak something very clearly to his heart.

*Now the LORD said to Abram, "Leave your country and your kindred and your father's house and go to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. (Genesis 12:1-2)*

This man's name was Abram. At 75 years of age, he heard this call from God and he obeyed without hesitation.<sup>1</sup> He immediately left the land of his fathers, and after a long and difficult journey, he entered into the land that God showed him and became a new creation in the land of promise.<sup>2</sup> God called this new man *Abraham*, because he would be the father of a great nation, for God wanted a whole nation of people with the same heart as this man. Abraham's response to God's call would forever be the foundation for all those who would come after him, desiring to follow their Creator.<sup>3</sup>

Abraham was called to *leave* one place and *enter* into another. Had he not left the land of his fathers, he would not have been qualified to be the seed of the nation God wanted to establish. He had to obey the call. Some 4000 years later, the same response is required of anyone who wishes to be saved from this perverted generation.<sup>4</sup>

## Babylon, Circa 500 BC

Many years later, God called Abraham's wayward offspring, who

had been in Babylon for 70 years of discipline, to leave and return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.<sup>5</sup> Of the roughly one million Jews who were living in Babylon at that time, only about 42,000 returned.<sup>6</sup> Most had grown comfortable with their lives



in Babylon. As Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian wrote in his chronicles, "...yet did many of them stay at Babylon, as not willing to leave their possessions."<sup>7</sup>

The journey back to Jerusalem was over 700 miles. It wasn't easy. The comforts of Babylon could not accompany those who left on the journey. But for those whose hearts were stirred by the call to return to the land that God had promised to their forefather Abraham, and to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, the suffering could not compare with the joy set before them. It was only the remnant who thirsted for their land that heard the call and obeyed.

## Galilee, Circa 30 AD

These stories of Abraham, Israel, the Babylonian exile, and the return to rebuild were passed down from generation to generation until

Yahshua\* heard them from His mother and father, and from the rabbis. Surely, with His tender and pure heart, He must have asked His parents and teachers why so many stayed behind in Babylon. It must have been so difficult for Him to understand why anyone would not heed the call to return and rebuild their beloved city. Imagine the look on His young face when His parents had to explain to Him that it was because they had grown comfortable and didn't want to leave their possessions and unwilling family members. Why would anyone hesitate if their God was calling them? Why would anyone value "things" over doing God's will?

As time went by and Yahshua grew into a man, He found Himself extending the very same call to his fellow Israelites.<sup>8</sup>

*And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him." (Matthew 4:18-22)*

*After that He went out and noticed a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, "Follow Me." And he left everything behind, and got up and began to follow Him." (Luke 5:27-28)*

Yahshua called His disciples in the very same way that God had called both Abraham and the Jews out of Babylon. Those who were stirred in their hearts did not hesitate, but left everything to follow him.<sup>9</sup> It was

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 12:4 <sup>2</sup> Genesis 17:1-8 <sup>3</sup> Hebrews 11:8; John 7:17-18 <sup>4</sup> Acts 2:40 <sup>5</sup> Ezra 1:3-5 <sup>6</sup> Ezra 2:64 <sup>7</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 11.1.1-3. <sup>8</sup> Mark 1:16-20 <sup>9</sup> Mark 10:28-30 \*Yahshua is the Hebrew name of the Son of God. Please see page 62 for a more in-depth explanation.



**Disciples are called to literally lay down all family attachments, worldly entanglements and material security to follow Messiah.**

consistent with the way His Father had always called those who were willing to do His will.

However, like the many who had stayed behind in Babylon, there were many in the Master’s day who chose comfort over their salvation. When a well-to-do young man came running and knelt down at Yahshua’s feet, asking what he must do to gain eternal life, Yahshua answered,

*“Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up your cross, and follow Me.” (Mark 10:21)*

Though the rich young man heard the clear call just as his forefather Abraham had, his face fell.<sup>10</sup> He valued his possessions more than following the Master. He had a *cause* to not obey Him.<sup>11</sup> The dark shadow of the torment he would someday face in death slowly fell over his face with the deepest gloom. He would rather have heard another message, one that would have allowed him to hold onto his life and possessions, but this was not the command, nor had it been for Abraham or the Jews in Babylon.

Peter, Andrew, James, and John left their nets,<sup>12</sup> which were their profession and livelihood, to follow the

Master. Paul also “suffered the loss of all things,”<sup>13</sup> counting it as rubbish. All who responded to the gospel left everything behind. The contrast between Mark 10:28-30 and verses 17-22 is chilling. What does it profit a man if he gains the whole entire world yet forfeits his own soul?<sup>14</sup>

In the same manner as Abraham, those who heard the good news on the day of Pentecost, *gladly* received the message and left everything.<sup>15</sup> Their possessions were used to establish the first community, as it is recorded:

*Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. (Acts 2:44-45; see also Acts 4:32-35)*

So these steps are the steps of a faith that *works*. Abraham did it and started a whole new culture and nation. The first disciples did the same. Therefore, these same essential steps of *that* faith must be followed today by anyone who desires to be saved.<sup>16</sup> All those in the first century who were cut to the heart by the gospel they heard knew what they had to do before they could call upon the name of the Lord to be saved. They understood that the terms of gospel were life for life, without

compromise. If they wanted to drink of the living water, it meant forsaking their life, and all that it encompassed, and being immersed into the new culture that was before them.

**Here and Now**

*Then He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” (Revelation 21:6-8)*

At the head of the list of those worthy of spending eternity in the lake of fire are the *cowardly and unbelieving*. They are those who, for the fear of losing their own life and possessions in this world, reject the gospel that they hear from a righteous sent one.<sup>17</sup> They do not overcome all that stands in the way of drinking the water of life. They are unwilling to leave their life in the fallen society. They have a cause that is greater in their eyes than the call of Messiah and His Bride:

*“And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And the one who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.” (Revelation 22:17)*

The word translated *freely* literally means *without a cause* to hinder them from drinking. The word *come* means to leave one place and arrive at another.<sup>18</sup> So if anyone is truly *thirsty* for the water of eternal life, let him *overcome* anything that would hinder him, *leave* behind all that he possesses, and follow the Master in the same way the disciples did.<sup>19</sup> Those who are willing to do the will of the Father will *come* gladly, with great joy over the hope of gaining the thirst-quenching water of eternal life.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Mark 10:22 <sup>11</sup> Revelation 22:17 <sup>12</sup> Matthew 4:18-22 <sup>13</sup> Philippians 3:8 <sup>14</sup> Mk 8:36 <sup>15</sup> Acts 2:41 <sup>16</sup> John 8:39 <sup>17</sup> Matthew 10:40-41; John 13:20; 7:17-18 <sup>18</sup> John 6:44 <sup>19</sup> Luke 10:16; Matthew 10:37; Luke 14:26,33 <sup>20</sup> Matthew 13:44 <sup>21</sup> Colossians 1:13 <sup>22</sup> Acts 5:20; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Acts 2:36-45



**The First Step  
in Obeying the Gospel**

Just as Abraham and the disciples of old obeyed, the first step in obeying the gospel is to *leave* one place and *enter* another.<sup>21</sup> You leave your old life in this world and are born again into a brand new culture, with a brand new heart that is quenched of all thirst.<sup>22</sup> Abraham did what the rich young ruler would not do. He turned his back on his previous life. He did not cower back at the command to leave it all behind. He said his farewells, kissed his loved ones good-bye, and placed his life in the hands and care of the One who called him to the land of promise. None but the willing will *come* to this new place.

So can someone be a disciple, yet remain in Babylon? Can one become a disciple while remaining in his old life, at the same address, working the same job, enslaved to the same passions,<sup>23</sup> immersed in the affairs of this world?<sup>24</sup> Can one accept the world's values, judgments, and political pursuits and be a disciple?<sup>25</sup> Is it possible to wallow in the world's excesses, letting your children be trained by the world's ideals,<sup>26</sup> being fully identified with the world, yet claim to follow in the steps of Abraham?<sup>27</sup>

The answer is the same today as it was then: *No*.

If you are willing to do the will of God, you will hear the call and come.

You will *leave* your rotten, stinking life in this world and *enter* into the new life of love and forgiveness that the Messiah, Yahshua, is establishing in these last days.<sup>28</sup> Only *there* can you serve Him<sup>29</sup> by serving your brothers and sisters, night and day.<sup>30</sup> And only *there* can you *become* one of those whom He is not ashamed to call His brothers,<sup>31</sup> who together are being built into an eternal dwelling place for God by His Spirit.<sup>32</sup>

We welcome any who are still thirsty to *come*. ☺

<sup>23</sup> 1 John 2:1 <sup>24</sup> 2 Timothy 2:4 <sup>25</sup> John 18:36 <sup>26</sup> In a recent poll of Christian families concerning how they raise their children, the top goal that parents had was their children getting a good education. Considering the words in Matthew 5:13-16, you may find the following quote surprising: "You might expect that parents who are born-again Christians would take a different approach to raising their children than did parents who have not committed their life to Christ, but that was rarely the case," Barna explained. "For instance, we found that the qualities born-again parents say an effective parent must possess, the outcomes they hope to facilitate in the lives of their children, and the media monitoring process in the household was indistinguishable from the approach taken by parents who are not born again." *Parents Describe How They Raise Their Children*, February 28, 2005, Barna Research Group. <sup>27</sup> 1 John 5:19 <sup>28</sup> John 13:34-35 <sup>29</sup> John 12:26 <sup>30</sup> Acts 26:7 <sup>31</sup> Hebrews 2:11 <sup>32</sup> Ephesians 2:21-22; 4:16

**Can one accept the world's values, judgments, and political pursuits and be a disciple? The answer is the same today as it was then: No.**





# GOOD SOLDIERS OF CHRIST

**W**e are living in the perilous times Paul wrote about in 2 Timothy 3. Paul predicted a time of great danger, compromise, and catastrophic breakdown of moral character. We see it all around us in the world today. It is the evidence that God's enemies are taking over the world in unprecedented fashion. God's people are a very important part of what must happen at this time of history, "in the last days." There is only one place that God's enemies will be driven out, and that place is the church. As those enemies are being driven out, His people will become a true light to the nations and the witness of the kingdom that is coming when Christ returns.

**P**aul told Timothy, "Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things,"<sup>1</sup> so that as "good soldiers" of Christ they could know how to defeat His enemies. Have you ever considered, if Yahshua won the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil, why does the Bible say that He must remain in heaven *until* all His enemies are made a footstool under His feet?<sup>2</sup>

We believe that if you are a sincere Christian and you genuinely consider what Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:2-6 you will begin to understand this seeming contradiction in the Scriptures. In other words, if He defeated the devil, why then must He remain in heaven until all His enemies are made a footstool under His feet? And who's going to make them a footstool since He is in heaven? It seems as though it has to be His followers who do it, doesn't it?<sup>3</sup>

So if we are to put all His enemies under His feet before He can return, then we need to find out how to be good soldiers so that we can conquer them. In fact, how could anything please Him more than this? Let's consider what Paul is saying and maybe we can understand a very essential thing: the difference between the life of a good soldier and the life of a civilian. We must apply the "litmus test"<sup>4</sup> of verses 2-6 to our lives in order to know where we stand.

The "litmus test" of 2 Timothy 2:2-7 establishes whether or not a believer is a true soldier of Christ. The criterion is whether or not "one engaged in warfare entangles himself in the affairs of this life." Paul said in verse 4 that *no one* engaged in waging war for his commander-in-chief will get involved in the affairs of civilian life, that is, if he truly wants to please the one who enlisted him. Civilian life is what a person does every day if he is not enlisted in the military. The life of a soldier is what he does every day in preparing to go to war to defeat a deadly enemy. The sign that an enemy is defeated is when the victor puts the head of his enemy under his feet. This is the goal of a good soldier in God's army. Can you imagine a soldier trying to wage war and work in the civilian world to support himself at the same time?

We can see what constitutes civilian life by reading Matthew 6:31-32: "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles [civilians] seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." A civilian is one who seeks his own food, clothing, and shelter. This is the civilian life of the nations of the world. This is how the world lives.

A good soldier has one purpose — to please the one who enlisted him. A person enlists in God's army because

he wants to serve Him and carry out His will. In order to be in God's army one must obey the gospel — the terms of enlistment. He hates his life in this world that is *still* ruled by Satan and wants to see his rule come to an end. Every soldier in boot camp gets to know his leader by learning to obey him in every command he gives. You bring with you to boot camp only what is surrendered to the cause you're enlisting for, as Luke 14:26-33 makes clear. Soldiers of Christ don't get involved in anything of the world, for it would distract them and sap their strength away from fighting the enemies of God that they have been enlisted to defeat and put under their Commander's feet.

All believers are commanded *not* to love the world or the things in the world, because if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.<sup>5</sup> You see, if a person loves the world or the things in the world (as evidenced by involvement in the world's affairs), he is not obeying the commands of his Commander-in-Chief. And if he isn't obeying His commands, he doesn't love Him, and therefore the Commander can't reveal Himself to him to give him understanding in all things.<sup>6</sup> He can't teach him how to use His weapons of warfare (Ephesians 6:10-18).

The gospel can only be understood in the context of being a soldier fully engaged in fighting the enemies of his



Master and Savior. This takes a total, all-out effort — a full participation with everything you have, all your time and energy, as well as all your possessions. The enemies of God are all the ways that spirits attach themselves to our desires, the desires of our flesh. The “fruit” or outcome is obvious. It is recorded in Galatians 5:19-21. This fruit is called “the works of the flesh.” We were saved for “good works” spoken of in Ephesians 2:10 which we can *only* do if we are obedient to the Spirit of the One who enlisted us. He has a battle plan that assures victory over the enemy. His banner is love<sup>7</sup> and He has gone before us as our example. He overcame all His enemies and sat down on the throne of His Father. We must do the same<sup>8</sup> *now* as good soldiers in order to bring this wicked age to an end.

If He truly is the one who enlisted us, then we want to walk as He did and follow His example, loving one another as He loved us. This is the path of victory under the banner of love in God’s army. If we love something more, then we should go and do it as Deuteronomy 20 says, but then let’s not say we know Him and are His followers. For He is engaged in winning the war and He is the supreme Commander-in-Chief and is not interested in civilian affairs. He made it clear that the world is passing away along with all its fleshly desires, but the one who does His will live forever.<sup>9</sup> If we say we’re His soldiers and that He enlisted us, then we must follow His commands, learn His battle plan and execute it with all diligence.<sup>10</sup>

If you take a look at what’s being preached every Sunday in your church, you’ll probably find out that the Bible is being taught from the context of civilian life in the world,

applying the words of the Bible to living like the Gentiles. Remember that according to what Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:2-7 among many witnesses that “if anyone competes in athletics,



***Can you imagine a soldier trying to wage war and work in the civilian world to support himself at the same time? A civilian is one who seeks his own food, clothing, and shelter. This is the civilian life of the nations of the world. This is how the world lives. The gospel can only be understood in the context of being a soldier fully engaged in fighting the enemies of his Master and Savior. This takes a total, all-out effort — a full participation with everything you have, all your time and energy, as well as all your possessions.***

he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules” (verse 5). Interpreting the Bible in terms of civilian life is not competing by the rules. It’s like an athlete winning a race only to be disqualified because he used illegal drugs in training.

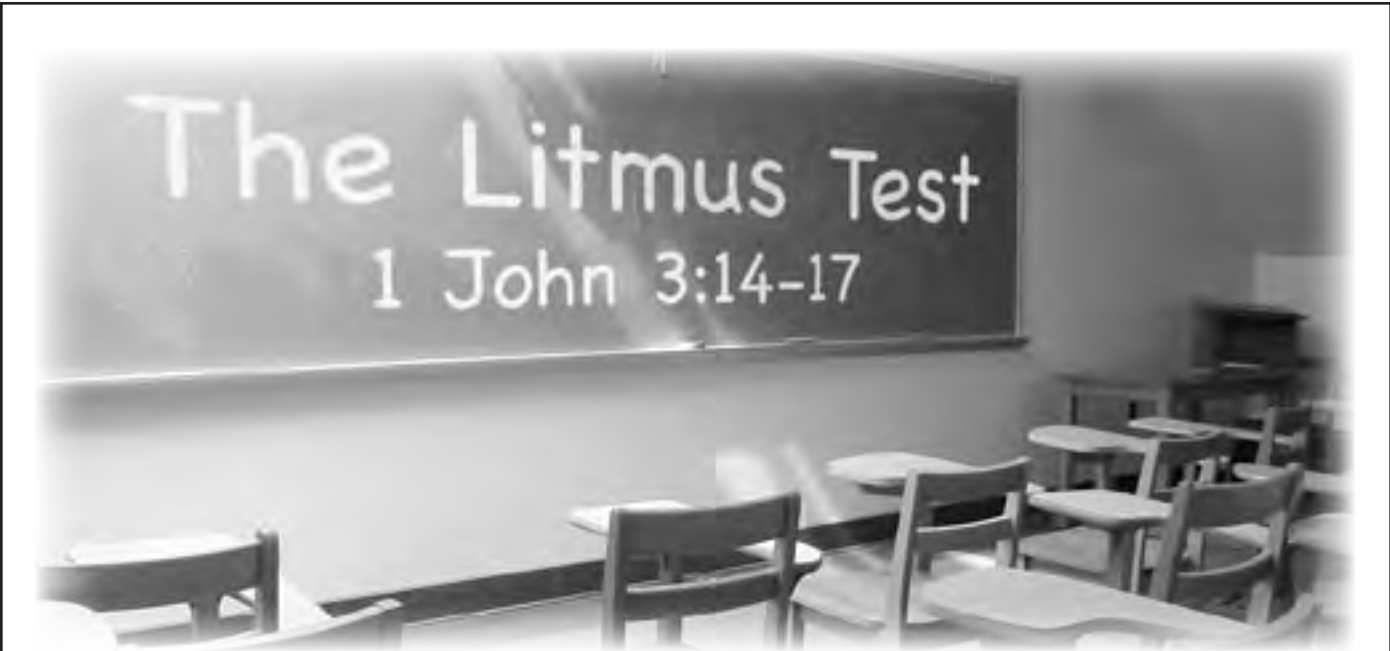
We have to live for the cause He came for, lived for, and died for. He said in John 18:37, “For this cause I

was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” The truth in 2 Timothy 2:2-7 reveals the nature of the life of His true followers — absolute devotion. The truth has a sting to it that exposes whether we have failed the litmus test of His word and lack revelation of the kingdom, which we’re supposed to be building on earth.

The comprehensive gospel is a litmus test with well-defined criteria. If you can understand these criteria then you can see why we in the Twelve Tribes communities live the way we do. Seeking first the kingdom as Matthew 6:33 commands us to do means that we employ all that we have in serving others. No one lives for himself, to make his own living and live in his own house with his own job. No, those with understanding are living totally for others, and all their needs are being met by their brothers and sisters. Living this way is how we can serve Him where He is and therefore be honored by our Father in heaven, as our Master said in John 12:26.

Living this way is what will drive out all His enemies that have darkened this world for 6,000 years. Following the standard of love by obeying the One who enlisted us is what exposes all these dark enemies of God to the light of His life<sup>11</sup> and causes them to flee. This light gives illumination and hope as a beacon to all mankind and a harbinger proclaiming that the end of this age is near.<sup>12</sup> So, let all who are sincere join together under *this* banner and fight with all our might, for we have His great promises and His great victory to assure us. ☪

<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 2:7 <sup>2</sup> Hebrews 10:12-13 <sup>3</sup> Revelation 12:9-11 <sup>4</sup> A *litmus test* is a test in which a single factor is decisive in proving the presence or absence of something. <sup>5</sup> 1 John 2:15 <sup>6</sup> John 14:21 <sup>7</sup> Song of Solomon 2:4 <sup>8</sup> Revelation 3:21 <sup>9</sup> 1 John 2:17 <sup>10</sup> 1 John 2:4,6 <sup>11</sup> John 1:4 <sup>12</sup> Luke 1:77-79



# The Litmus Test

## 1 John 3:14-17

A “litmus test” is a test in which a single factor is decisive in proving the presence or absence of something. “I have eternal life,” many said, as I did, but passing the litmus test determines whether someone has truly believed *as the Scriptures say*.

*In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:37-39)*

*Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water [the Holy Spirit].” ... whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.” (John 4:10,14)*

So how do the scriptures say one must believe in order to have this river of living water flowing out of him? For the scriptures give us the litmus test in order that we could know whether we have passed from death to life and have truly received the Holy Spirit — the *Water of Life*. John 5:24 presents the good news in very clear and simple terms:

*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.*

But how does anyone *know* he is saved? Does he know because the preacher tells him so? Is it enough to hear, “I know that I know that I know I am saved”? It wasn’t enough for me. I still wasn’t *sure*. Something very deep seemed to be missing. Then I discovered — well, friends showed me — the marvelous first letter of John. It tells

everyone how they can *know*. It gives all of us the litmus test. Take it yourself. Read through First John, then especially consider chapter 3, verses 14, 16, and 17. They utterly disqualify mere mental belief:

*<sup>14</sup>We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. <sup>16</sup>By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. <sup>17</sup>But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?*

### The Test

The criterion for the litmus test is verse 14 — “Do you love the brethren?” When a person has been saved, and has passed from death into life, and partaken of the water of life, the inevitable result will be that he loves the brethren. The presence or absence of true salvation will be revealed by the results of the litmus test.

“I love my brothers and sisters in the Lord,” most would say, and that was my first response, I must admit. Most people would claim to love the brethren, so how could that be the litmus test for true salvation?

The answer: We must define our terms the way the Bible does, and the way the Apostle John did. He gives the definition for “love” in verse 16: “we *know* love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” How did the Son of God demonstrate love? By laying down His life every day for His disciples and for others, not considering His own needs, sharing everything that He had, considering even the outcasts and the lowly, appealing to the high-minded and proud, even sacrificing His very life for the good of others. This is the love of God, and this is the factor that is poured into the heart of a person who is truly saved.<sup>1</sup>



Verse 17 defines the test results even further. If a person has something and he sees a brother in need, if he does not share what he has, it is proof-negative for the love of God being present in His heart. Selfishness, greed, accumulations of possessions, and lacks of sharing indicate that true salvation is not present.

We can see the proof-positive results of a people who passed the litmus test in Acts 2:42 — “All who believed shared all things in common... And there were no needy among them, for they shared everything in common.” But later, when the letter of 1 John was written, the church was filled with many people who had a kind of belief, but it was not *saving* belief, as they were not able to demonstrate, try though they might, the proving factor of loving as the Son of God had loved.

That’s why 1 John was written; its sole purpose was that those who read it could know whether they had really received saving faith. For the Savior and the apostles knew that people could believe in vain<sup>2</sup> (as I had, and maybe you have), but their heart still reached out to them. John put something special in 1 John 5:13 — a provision, just for those who didn’t pass the litmus tests of 1 John 2:4, 3:17, and 4:20.

Some would claim to see, even though they were blind, as *Yahshua*\* spoke of in John 9:41. Their guilt can’t be removed. But those who *don’t* claim to see, and so *don’t* have the confidence after reading 1 John that they have passed out of death into life, still have an opportunity to believe and love as their Master commanded all His disciples to love, which was just as He had loved them.<sup>3</sup> The Authorized Version (KJV) gets this very important verse right:

*These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that*

*ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. (1 John 5:13)*

That is why John repeats the phrase “believe on the name of the Son of God” in verse 13. So 1 John 5:12-13 struck home to some in John’s day who thought they had believed on the name of the Son, but discovered, after reading the letter, that they could not confess they had truly passed out of death and into life. In fact, they were now sure that the love of God did not abide in their hearts. After this rude awakening, they took hope in John’s promise that they could yet believe and surrender their life to the True One whom John knew.<sup>4</sup>

In every other translation you can see how they tried to make sense out of this seemingly confusing verse. But understanding the intentions of John in writing this makes it clear that he wasn’t being redundant in what he was saying. So you could read it: “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may [still have an opportunity to] believe on the name of the Son of God [if you can honestly see that your life doesn’t match up to everything that is written in this letter].”

### Confidence Towards God

The litmus test of 1 John reveals the presence or absence of the love of God. Paul wrote in Romans 5:5 that “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.” The book of 1 John lets anyone know who wants to know whether this has actually happened in his life, or whether he only has the *concept* of love without the *power* to love.

*My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. <sup>19</sup>And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure*

*our hearts before Him. <sup>20</sup>For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. <sup>21</sup>Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. (1 John 3:18-21)*

In these verses, John is not teaching that even though our heart condemns us for failing to love our brother in deed and truth, God overlooks it and does not hold us guilty for not loving and not obeying His word. That is why the next verse says that if our hearts don’t condemn us (because we do love our brothers), then we have confidence towards God. If we are not loving as He loved, then we do not and we cannot have confidence towards God. Indeed, He knows our heart. He knows in a greater and more comprehensive way than we do why and how we fail to love. And, He does not overlook it. He is not partial.

### Those Who Have the Son Have the Life

Those who have the Son have the life,<sup>5</sup> which is the one thing I knew I didn’t have, caught up as I was in the rat race, like everyone else. No matter how much I did, being part of the church council, Sunday School Superintendent, giving of my time and money, my daily life was much the same as everyone in the world around me. The only practical difference was that I went to church on Wednesday evening and on Sunday, and they didn’t. The void inside of me and the lack of confidence that I was saved, never went away.

The first believers seemed to have something I didn’t have. They had not only received the *whole message of this new life*, as the angel told Peter to preach in Acts 5:20, but they had received *the life* itself. And it was a *life together!* That was the difference. Seeing that opened up the reality of what it meant to believe.

<sup>1</sup> Romans 5:5 <sup>2</sup> John 2:23-25; 8:30-44; 1 Corinthians 15:2 <sup>3</sup> John 13:34-35 <sup>4</sup> 1 John 5:20 <sup>5</sup> 1 John 5:12 in the NASB reads, “He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.” \* *Yahshua* is the Hebrew name for Jesus; see page 62.

### What it Means to Believe

To *believe* means to be persuaded in one's heart of the truth by the Holy Spirit through hearing the gospel from a righteous sent one, as the Savior spoke of in John 7:18. Such a one is true because he is not seeking his own glory, but the glory of the One who sent him. And such a one is spiritually and morally clean, for Yahshua said, "There is no unrighteousness in him."

How could anyone have truly believed in the True One without a true preacher speaking the very Word of Messiah?<sup>6</sup> The one who is doing the Father's will must meet the one who is willing to do the Father's will. The hearer is then given the needed illumination by the Father as our Master said, "He shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God."<sup>7</sup> The gospel is then the power of God for salvation, and the Father communicates the "good gift" of the Holy Spirit to those who are persuaded to die to themselves, take up their cross, and do His will.

John 3:16 is probably the best known and most loved verse in the Bible, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." But what does it mean to *believe* as this verse says, to put one's complete trust in the Savior of the world?<sup>8</sup> The Scriptures tell all of us plainly, if we are willing to listen. The word *believes* in John 3:16 is the same Greek word as *believed* in Acts 2:44, which tells us two absolutely essential things about all who believe: "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common."

This was very good news to me, because when I found the people who lived the life of faith, it meant I had also found a place to belong, a place to call home — true community.

### Epistle of Straw?

Some in John's day obviously were not in fellowship with God, as 1 John 1:6 says. And they were not in fellowship with John either, which is why he writes his letter:

*That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:3)*

John, of course, knew all about abiding in Him and bearing fruit, because the love of God was in his heart. He had borne much fruit and so had proven to be one of His

*That's why 1 John was written; that those who read it could know whether they had really received saving faith. For the Savior and the apostles knew that people could believe in vain.*

disciples. That was all John wanted for those who believed in Yahshua through his message. John used the word *fellowship* in 1 John 1:3, which is the same word translated *fellowship*<sup>9</sup> in Acts 2:42. This is the Greek word *koinonia*, which means a sharing of all you are and all you have — communication, distribution, and participation. This is the life of faith that the early believers and the apostles shared with Yahshua and the Father.

*Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued stead-*

*fastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. (Acts 2:41-42)*

Many had not continued steadfastly in John's teachings and fellowship. They had fallen from the glory the church began with. John explained what this meant in 1 John 2:4, "He who says, 'I know Him' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

Some may think that keeping His commandments places them under the law. And it is true: trying to keep His commandments without the Holy Spirit would be bondage and legalism. Yet those who walk in the Spirit can fulfill the righteous requirements of the law.<sup>10</sup> Others may say, "I obey His commandments and keep His word," but He said this is only possible for those who hate their life in this world, and who come to the place where He is:

*He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup>If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor. (John 12:25-26)*

When 1 John was read to the church, those who heard it had to judge their walk according to the litmus test of 1 John 1:7 and 1 John 2:6. That is just what we have to do today when we read it: ask ourselves the question, "Do we have fellowship (a common life) with one another because we walk as He walked?" They could not have fellowship with the Savior in heaven without having it with John, their apostle, as well. His letter did not persuade those who were not in fellowship with him. They continued to love the world, dispute his teachings, and not meet the needs of their brothers. Such "believers" effectively discarded 1 John as an "epistle of straw."

<sup>6</sup> Romans 10:14-17 <sup>7</sup> John 7:17 <sup>8</sup> The word *believe* (*pisteuo*) is #4100 in *Strong's Greek Concordance*. It comes from #4102 (*pistis*), *persuasion*, which is derived from #3982 (*peitho*), meaning *to convince*. <sup>9</sup> *Fellowship* is in the Greek a very rich word: (#2842 from 2844); partnership, i.e. (literally) participation, or (social) intercourse, or (pecuniary, which means relating to or involving money) benefaction; (to) communicate, communication, communion, contribution, distribution, fellowship. <sup>10</sup> Romans 8:1-4



Martin Luther's condemnation of the Letter of James as just such a worthless epistle (calling it an "epistle of straw") shows how easily this can happen. Luther was upset because it threw a wrench into his gospel of being saved by faith alone, for James wrote "faith without works is dead," and "The religion of a man is worthless who does not bridle his tongue, for instance, or care for the widows

and the orphans in his community."<sup>11</sup> Faced with this, Luther, a man famous for his foul tongue and fiery invective, had to make a choice.<sup>12</sup> Was he wrong? Had he himself failed the litmus test James gave him? Or was James wrong, uninspired — a man of the flesh? Like the "stiff-necked" men of old Israel, Luther "stoned the prophet" rather than trembling at his word.

That is why disregarding 1 John as an "epistle of straw" doesn't mean to question its inspiration, authorship, or date of composition. It means to *ignore* (as Martin Luther ignored the Letter of James) the evidence of the litmus test which 1 John gives to all who claim to believe. His sheep hear His voice and do not reason it away, even when He tells them they don't really know Him or His salvation. ❧

<sup>11</sup> James 2:14-17 and 1:26, respectively <sup>12</sup> One example among many by Luther, which directly contradicts James 3:9: "For I am unable to pray without at the same time cursing," Luther said, "If I am prompted to say, 'Hallowed be Thy name,' I must add, 'Cursed, damned, outraged be the name of papists.' Indeed, I pray thus orally every day and in my heart, without intermission" And concerning Catholic clergy he wrote, "The Rhine is scarcely big enough to drown the whole accursed gang of Roman extortioners... cardinals, archbishops, bishops, and abbots." (Quoted in W. Durant, *The Reformation*, p. 418)

## SCHISM IN ONENESS

It doesn't sound as pretty as "unity in diversity."

*Schism* is an older term for division in the Body of Messiah that points to its beginnings. In the Greek language, *schisma* comes from *schizo*, a familiar root today of words like *schizophrenia*<sup>1</sup> and *schizoid*. It is what happens to the Body when different sentiments prevail among believers: it becomes schizophrenic. This naturally leads to factions as the people follow whichever charismatic figure appeals to them.<sup>2</sup>

Schism arises from different personal preferences, especially having different sentiments about the anointing that John said "teaches us all things" (1 John 2:27). This caused breaches or gaps in the unity of Body of Messiah where once there was "one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all."<sup>3</sup>

*Sentiment* is an opinion or feeling, a certain delicacy or sympathy towards something. It is an idea colored by one's

emotions or tastes, as is expressed by many in their search for the church that is "right" for them. One goes for this flavor, another for that, as though they were purchasing ice cream.

Schism led to division in the early church, which held Yahshua up to public shame and disgrace. The disgraceful thing about division is that it communicates to the world that Christ is a useless Savior. Schism then and now expresses a distinction between different preferences (or tastes) concerning the Scriptures, almost always in what one believes, not in what one does. All denominations basically look the same to the outside world — work the same, act the same, and love the things of the world the same.<sup>4</sup>

The divided church of yesterday, today, and tomorrow is at cross-purposes with itself. In fact, it is a house divided against itself, and recognizing that it is fallen is the first step out of its ruin — the first step into the light.

<sup>1</sup> *Schizophrenia* is defined as "any of several psychotic disorders characterized by distortions of reality and disturbances of thought and language and withdrawal from social contact." <sup>2</sup> Titus 3:10-11, 1 Corinthians 1:10, 11:18, 12:25 <sup>3</sup> Ephesians 4:4-6 <sup>4</sup> 1 John 2:15

# *Love is a Many Splendored Thing*

*Love is a many-splendored thing,  
It's the April rose that only grows in the early Spring.  
Love is nature's way of giving,  
A reason to be living,  
The golden crown that makes a man a king.  
Once on a high and windy hill,  
In the morning mist, two lovers kissed and the world stood still.  
Then your fingers touched my silent heart and taught it how to sing,  
Yes, true love's a many-splendored thing.*

**T**True love... Is it just a fleeting fantasy, a mirage that evaporates in the harsh realities of life? Is it only a Hollywood hoax to fool us into hoping it could happen to us? If it were real, what would be its substance? How could it endure?

I happened upon a happy woman the other day. She had a certain glory upon her as she brooded over her lively and pleasant children. The deep contentment of a happy marriage and a purposeful life radiated from her. It was not that her life had been easy. By western standards she would be considered poor. Raised in an orphanage after a family tragedy, she had a lot to overcome. And it was not that her husband was particularly handsome or faultless. He also was from a broken family and had his own ingrained iniquities. But twelve years and five children into their marriage they are still deeply in love. There is

no denying the fact that they have found something precious that has eluded most of humanity.

Their marriage is a duet<sup>1</sup> rather than a duel.<sup>2</sup> It isn't merely the result of an idyllic romance or adherence to a set of biblical principles, although they were very much in love with one another when they were married, and they did indeed respect the authority and divine inspiration of the Bible. Countless are the failed marriages that have begun with those two valuable but

insufficient ingredients. But the marriage of Jennifer and Daniel is the fruit of a restoration in their own lives to the very purpose for which they were created.

God created man in His own image and likeness, as male and female, in order to fill the earth and ultimately the universe with His highest creation, to rule over it in love. For this purpose He gave them *eros* — sexual desire for one another — and the exquisite pleasure of its fulfillment. Both are from His hand, and both are intended not only for the propagation of human life, but also for the bonding of husband and wife into a lifelong covenant relationship to create stable, secure families.

God established the role of desire, and the suffering that attends it because of the Fall, for the stability of marriage and the family:

<sup>16</sup> *To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring*



<sup>1</sup> A *duet* is a musical composition of two complimentary and equally important parts. <sup>2</sup> A *duel* is a contest with deadly weapons between two parties to settle an irreconcilable difference.



forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”<sup>17</sup> And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;<sup>18</sup> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.<sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:16-19)

A woman’s desire for her husband kindles the fire of his eros for her. It is her response to his attention that gives him the confidence to take her under his protective rule and love her with his whole heart. This womanly desire stimulates his love for her and directs his sexual energies toward her. It protects both her and him from all other evil desires, even from Satan himself. It was their Creator’s intention that a man and his wife would know only each other sexually, and that their coming together would bond them heart and soul into one God-like social unit<sup>3</sup> — a building block of human civilization. They would be co-workers in creation with Him, procreating desired children and pouring their lives into those children to make them secure and productive.

After the Fall, God multiplied the pain that both the woman and the man would have to bear in their

respective roles in the marriage. This was not so much a punishment as a provision to increase their dependence upon their Creator and to strengthen their character and their relationships with one another and with their children. The pain of childbirth bonds a woman to her children, and to her husband whose heart wells up with love and respect for his wife as he sees her suffer to give birth to his children. The woman’s respect for her husband increases as she sees him labor to provide for her from the reluctant earth, and

he has drifted a long ways from it. Most men and women today are out of this order and the resulting dysfunction is bringing humanity to the brink of destruction. The natural desire God put in woman for man she has subverted to usurp his rule, while the man has either abdicated his rulership or used his strength to dominate and oppress the woman. Marriage has become a duel rather than a duet, and countless men and women have abandoned it altogether, gratifying their sexual impulses in increasingly perverse and destructive ways. “Love” has become a “many-splintered”

thing rather than a many-splendored thing, and the devastating consequences for untold generations of children are mounting into a global nightmare of unimaginable proportions.

By far the most shameful fact of this landslide of degradation is the utter impotence of Christianity to restrain it.

Far from being the salt of the earth or the light to the nations, she has been sliding down the slippery slope of compromise herself, winking at immorality in the clergy, ordaining homosexuals, and catering to the worldly appetites of her youth. According to *The Barna Group*,<sup>5</sup> a conservative Christian research agency,

- The divorce rate among Christians in America is the same as that among non-Christians;

- At least 30% of “born-again” adults support the legalization of same-gender sexual relations;

- There is no difference between “born-again” and unchurched



*Marriage has become a duel rather than a duet, and countless men and women have abandoned it altogether*

risk his life to protect her. Their children grow up to labor alongside their parents, essential to the running of the household, fields, and herds, which gives them dignity and keeps them out of trouble.

This is the order that God intended, which He has inscribed into the conscience of every human being. It is the foundational knowledge of good and evil that fallen man is accountable to live by,<sup>4</sup> but it is abundantly clear that

adults in the likelihood of viewing adult-only content on the Internet, or reading magazines, or watching videos with explicit sexual content.

And things are getting worse rather than better within Christianity as the years go by.

### Restoration

Where, then, is the restoration of humanity going to come from? Where can true love be found? It can only be found where true forgiveness is found. In fact, it can only be found where the truth is found. The truth sets people free from their sin. The problem with the world is that people are not set free from their sin. They are not forgiven and they cannot forgive, therefore they cannot live in peace with one another. And no amount of legislation can restore the order and harmony God intended for humanity.

That is not to say the world should revert to anarchy, but that those who profess faith in the Son of God should look to Him for the solution, not to this world, which is passing away, along with its desires.<sup>6</sup> Yahshua,\* the Son of God, is the very Word of God in human flesh, the living embodiment of the truth. He came to undo the works of the evil one, who is the father of lies.<sup>7</sup> Yahshua came to restore true love on the earth. But He did not even try to reform the existing political or religious establishment. He called His disciples out of the existing order and taught them the way of love.

They had to forsake everything to follow Him<sup>8</sup> — jobs, possessions, family, friends, even concepts and prejudices — anything and anyone that held them back from being fully surrendered and available to Him.



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*The woman's respect for her husband increases as she sees him labor to provide for her from the reluctant earth, and risk his life to protect her.*

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He put them on the foundation of absolute obedience to His words,<sup>9</sup> just as He was absolutely obedient to His Father's words.<sup>10</sup> On that foundation He could teach them how to love one another, in the only context in which love can be learned — living together. They were always together. Love cannot be learned in the abstract, but only in the daily realities of submitting to one another and bearing with each other's faults and failures.<sup>11</sup>

The night before His death, having taught them the way of love day and night for over three years, He left His disciples with the clearest expression of His will

for them:

*"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* (John 13:34-35)

And the disciple who had stayed the closest to Yahshua's side gave the authoritative commentary on His most important commandment, so that there would be no confusion about what He meant:

*<sup>14</sup> We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. <sup>15</sup> Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. <sup>16</sup> By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. <sup>17</sup> But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's*

\* For more on the name *Yahshua*, see *The Name Above All Names* on page 62 <sup>5</sup> <http://www.barna.org> <sup>6</sup> 1 John 2:17 <sup>7</sup> 1 John 3:8; John 8:44 <sup>8</sup> Mark 10:28-30; Matthew 4:17-22; 9:9 <sup>9</sup> Matthew 7:24-27; John 14:15,21,24 <sup>10</sup> John 5:19; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10 <sup>11</sup> Matthew 18:21-22; Mark 9:33-35 <sup>12</sup> Luke 9:23 <sup>13</sup> The *gospel* is primarily found in the Gospels. The letters of Paul and the other apostles consist of instruction and correction for those who are already in salvation. It is ironic that most of the popular "plans of salvation" make little use of the Gospels and much improper use of Paul's letters. As a result, very few people have actually heard and obeyed the gospel.



## Love Is a Many Splendored Thing

love abide in him?<sup>18</sup> Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:14-18)

They were to lay down their lives for one another daily,<sup>12</sup> just as their Master had laid down His life for them, both practically for all their years together, and ultimately by dying in their place. Love provides for another's needs; hatred holds back.

Everything Yahshua taught His disciples, by word and deed, from the day He called them until the moment He ascended into heaven after His resurrection, was the "Gospel of the Kingdom" which He entrusted to them.<sup>13</sup> They were His apprentices, so that when fully trained they would be just like their Teacher.<sup>14</sup> So there is no confusing His last solemn command to them. They were to spend the rest of their lives doing exactly what He had done for them — make disciples, teaching them, by word and example, to obey everything He had commanded them.<sup>15</sup> But this was no burden for them, for they had been deeply loved, so they also would love deeply, from the heart.

So when Peter first preached the gospel ten days later, on the Day of Pentecost, telling the people how to "be saved from this perverse generation," the effect was consistent with his training:

*Those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had*

*all things in common. And they were selling their property and possessions and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:41-47)*

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***Love cannot be learned  
in the abstract, but only  
in the daily realities  
of submitting to one  
another and bearing  
with each other's  
faults and failures.***

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*Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid*

*it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:32-35)*

The True One<sup>16</sup> who is Love had planted true love in a handful of willing and grateful hearts, and that seed had begun to bear the first fruits of love — a people with one heart and one way, just as the prophet Jeremiah had foretold.<sup>17</sup> They loved one another in the same way their Savior had loved them — by laying down their lives for one another — and there was no mistaking the fact that they were His disciples.<sup>18</sup> They had learned the way of love.

That is the way the church was in the first century, and there is no other way the church can be than the way it was when it was "the Way."<sup>19</sup> That is where true love is found, and that is where true love finds a way to set people free from their sin, so that restoration can happen. It is where two lost and damaged souls like Daniel, a wandering Jew, and Jennifer, a confused Christian, could each face the truth about their own condition and receive forgiveness as they forsook everything in the waters of baptism. And it is where the wise and loving hands of their brothers and sisters could put their lives on a good foundation and teach them the way of love. And having learned that way, two lives rescued from the collapsing world could be bonded together in a covenant of marriage that would express the true love between Messiah and His bride.

Multiplied thousands of redeemed lives such as theirs, knit together by the bonds of marriage and brotherhood, will be a great light of brilliance, a witness to the power of love that will someday fill the universe. Yes, true love is a many-splendored thing! 🌸



<sup>14</sup> Luke 6:40 <sup>15</sup> Matthew 28:19-20 <sup>16</sup> 1 John 5:20 <sup>17</sup> Jeremiah 32:38-41 <sup>18</sup> John 13:34-35 <sup>19</sup> Acts 22:4; 24:14,22



There is so much spoken about the Kingdom of God in the New Testament, it's amazing. One of the very first times Yahshua\* spoke, He spoke about the Kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup> It says, "It's right at the door! The Kingdom is right here! It's at hand!" And of course, all the Jews were looking for the Kingdom that was going to come and rout out the Roman Empire and establish Messiah's rule on the earth. That's what they were thinking He was talking about. Yahshua said, "It's right at hand," but of course two thousand years later, it still hasn't happened. But what He was talking about was the community He was going to establish by His Holy Spirit, which would be His reign in people's lives in the midst of a darkened world.

You can see that there are two manifestations of the Kingdom; the one now is like the mustard seed. We're like a mustard seed that's so tiny you can hardly see it. It's hardly observable. The birds of the air and the tiny field mice can hardly see it. It's so small, but it gets larger and larger and larger as it grows. It's not so observable, that Kingdom we're a part of, which will bring in the Millennial Kingdom when Yahshua returns to this earth. Then it will be totally observable. It will be a sudden display of the power of God.

So Yahshua talked about the mustard seed in Matthew 13:31-33,

how it falls to the ground unnoticed even by the birds and the mice and any other creature that would want to steal that seed. The seed sprouts up into a bush, and grows and grows so large that it's greater than all the plants in the garden. It's the biggest one. And all the birds of the air can nest in its branches — all the birds of different feathers, as it speaks about in Ezekiel 17:23. When that tree grows, all the birds of every feather, meaning different nationalities, cultures, and races, will come and dwell together in that one tree in one brand new culture and nation.



That is unheard of today. One kind of bird will occupy one tree and another the other tree, but they won't mix together. But in the last days, they

will dwell together. People from all different cultures will come together to be a part of that one new culture. That is contrary to fallen nature. In the natural world they can't live together. But we who believe will be able to live together, and that will be the greatest witness that the heavenly Father has done something in the hearts of men — that we can come out of that fatally flawed society and live together in peace.

So it begins small, and people even scorn it, but against all odds it grows and spreads throughout the world. And that mighty tree will bring healing and shelter to all the depressed and lonely people — all the people out there who need a home. He makes a home for the lonely.<sup>3</sup> In Luke 17:20, the Pharisees were asking, "Is the Kingdom going to come?" Yahshua replied, "*The Kingdom of God does not come with observation. Nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the Kingdom of God is among you.*"

The Kingdom of God certainly wasn't *within them* (as some translations read), for He was talking to the Pharisees. It is properly translated, "among you," as in the Living Bible, or "in your midst," as in the NASB. The translators missed the whole point, for the Kingdom that He's talking about doesn't come about noticeably or suddenly, with power and great armies. No! It comes "without observation." The Pharisees didn't even know that the Kingdom of God was in their midst. They were asking for the Kingdom of God and Yahshua said, "The Kingdom is among you right now!"

It's just like the people around us today — they don't understand that the Kingdom of God is in their midst. They may see a people living together who seemingly like one another, and are a little bit different, and they seem peaceful. But what they are seeing is just a tiny little seed growing. It's growing and growing, little by little, but it's not so

\* Yahshua is the Hebrew name for Jesus. See page 62 for a more in-depth explanation. <sup>1</sup> Mark 1:14-15 <sup>2</sup> Galations 3:28; 1 Peter 2:9,10 <sup>3</sup> Psalm 68:5,6



observable yet, not as it will be when the consummation of the age comes, after we have proclaimed the Gospel of the Kingdom as a witness.<sup>4</sup> We will have declared it by the witness of our life, by our living together just like Acts 2:44. And as we continued to grow, colonize, swarm, and spread all over the earth, then people were able to observe our behavior<sup>5</sup> more and more.

But now, we are struggling to even survive. It's against all odds that this mustard seed will sprout. But if it sprouts, even though from the tiniest seed, it becomes the biggest tree in the garden, and all the birds of different feathers will gather in its branches.

So the Kingdom doesn't come suddenly. It starts with the smallest seed. But that seed is still in the midst of all the people in each locality as it grows and grows. One might think the Kingdom isn't coming, but it's as in Yahshua's day — the Kingdom was in their midst and they didn't know it.

The apostles said in Acts 1:6, "Is this the time that the Kingdom which will rule the entire earth is going to come?"<sup>6</sup> But He said, "It's not for you to know." It was not for them to know, because Daniel is a sealed book, and its unsealing has to wait until the time of the end.<sup>7</sup> We know that in the very end of days, knowledge will increase and men will travel to and fro.<sup>8</sup> Knowledge will increase *exponentially* and become instantly available. Probably in those days, two thousand years ago, they thought they were in the last days because they had the Roman roads to travel on, but it is speaking of an *exponential* increase.

So it says in Luke 17:20 that the Kingdom does not come so that it is so apparent. It comes as the mustard seed — *stealthily*, which means to bring to pass in a not-so-observable manner. It unfolds a little at a time. It just sneaks in there and grows. No one really knows. Even the governments don't know what's going

on. If they knew this was the Stone Kingdom of Daniel's prophecy that is going to destroy all the governments and kings of the earth, they might do something about us (but God would just laugh at them, as Psalm 2:4 says). But it is growing stealthily. It is right in the midst of them and they don't even know it.

When Yahshua comes back, it's going to be a grand event, but now the emergence of the Kingdom is not such a grand event. Right now it's just little, humble us, and we gather people

*The Kingdom to come will be irresistible, but the Kingdom now is resistible. You can resist it if you want to. God made it that way because He only wants the pure in heart — those who love Him with all their heart, soul, and strength.*

as Daniel 2:44-45 says — a "stone" cut from the mountain of the world without human hands.

The first message Yahshua preached was that the Kingdom of God was at hand. But they were thinking, "The Messiah is coming to take over the world." But the people of Israel were totally rebellious at that point in their history. They felt as if they could just be given the Kingdom right then, but

they didn't deserve it. Yahshua said, "I'm going to take the Kingdom away from you and give it to a nation who will produce the fruit of it. Since you didn't produce the fruit, I'm going to give it to a nation who will!"<sup>9</sup>

That's why Paul said that "our twelve tribes who serve God night and day" will do it *for* them,<sup>10</sup> because we are here in their place, doing what they didn't do.<sup>11</sup> We do it for them in order that in the next age they can have the land that God promised to Abraham<sup>12</sup> when He walked through the split animals as if to say, "Let it be that if I don't give you this enemy-free land, I'll be cursed Myself."<sup>12</sup> He made a self-cursing oath. So there has to be a people who will carry it out for Him by His grace.

It says in Matthew 12:50, "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, my sister, and my mother." If you look up the word *does*, there is a great definition. It means to carry it out, to cause or make it happen. That is the one who *does* the will of our Father in heaven.<sup>13</sup> No one can do that except by being in the Body of Messiah, which has to be restored on the face of the earth.

### Two Aspects of the Kingdom

We have to understand about the two aspects of the Kingdom. The apostles said, "Is it us? Is the Kingdom going to come now? Are you going to return and establish the Kingdom in our lifetime?" They thought He was going to usher in the Kingdom after He rose from the dead. But Matthew 24:14 was a long ways off — two thousand years ahead, and they couldn't fathom that. Yahshua would have discouraged them if He had said, "No, you are all going to fall away." But Paul wondered whether he had labored in vain, though he knew he would have his reward.<sup>14</sup>

People lost their first love and became scattered and divided. And we



<sup>4</sup> Matthew 24:14 <sup>5</sup> 1 Peter 2:12 <sup>6</sup> Daniel 2:35 <sup>7</sup> Daniel 12:9; 2:44,45 <sup>8</sup> Daniel 12:4 <sup>9</sup> Matthew 21:43; 1 Peter 2:9 <sup>10</sup> Acts 26:7 in the Williams New Testament "...which promise our twelve tribes, by devotedly worshipping day and night, hope to see fulfilled for them. It is for this hope, your Majesty, that I am accused by some Jews." Genesis 18:19 <sup>11</sup> Genesis 15:18 <sup>12</sup> Genesis 15:8-21; Jeremiah 34:18-20 <sup>13</sup> Matthew 7:21; Ephesians 6:6; Hebrews 10:36; James 1:25; 1 Peter 4:2; 1 John 2:17; 3:22 <sup>14</sup> Galatians 4:11; Philippians 2:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 3:5

# A Mustard Seed

may see similar things going on in our midst, but we can't lose heart because we know the threshing floor has got to be cleared out. It's only the true wheat that will remain. All the chaff has got to be blown away because the chaff has no glory. But the wheat has glory; it has weight. You throw it up in the air and the chaff will blow away, but the wheat falls down at Yahshua's feet.

So it says *does* in Matthew 12:50. It's not the one who mentally *believes*, but the one who *does*. Faith without works is dead. *Does* speaks of a *doer* — one who takes an active part in bringing about what Yahshua told us to pray for in Matthew 6:9-11. We need to pray, "Father, I want your will to be done!" And who is going to do it? Someone has got to do His will, and whoever *does* it, that's His family. That's His brother and sister and mother. If we're not praying for it, we're certainly not going to do it. Only those who are praying for it will do it.

So the word *does* is speaking of the one who carries out His will, who brings it about, who does it deliberately,

knowing what he's doing. He causes or produces an effect, bringing it into existence. At first it's not so glorious, not so impressive to the natural eye.



## Mysteries of the Kingdom

That's what Yahshua said in Matthew 13:11, "The mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven have been revealed to you, but not to others." The kingdom that's now forming will become a great mountain that will fill the whole earth.<sup>15</sup> There are not two kingdoms — a kingdom now and then a kingdom to come. There's only one kingdom, and it turns into a great and mighty kingdom that governs the whole world.

Right now we're not political at all. We're not involved in the world's governments, but in the next age it

will all be the Kingdom of Yahshua. It will be a great and mighty kingdom as it talks about in Daniel 2:34-35. The stone, formed in this age, becomes a great mountain and fills the whole earth. As the parable in Matthew 13:33 says, the woman puts the yeast in her dough and it permeates the whole lump. Just a little leaven leavens the whole loaf, which is the whole world. But it is not in this age, but in the next age.

Yahshua spoke all these parables using similes and metaphors, and they can be so confusing in our minds. He spoke in so many figures of speech — about farming, fishing, women baking bread, and merchants buying pearls, and so much more. We have to consider it. It's only given to His disciples to understand it. The natural mind can't comprehend it. It's the secret, the mystery of the Kingdom.

## Resistible or Irresistible?

The Kingdom that is going to come will be irresistible, but the Kingdom

<sup>15</sup> Daniel 2:35

# Keys to the Kingdom



Keys have been deposited for us in different places. Yahshua told so many parables about fishing with nets, sheep and goats, baking bread, buried treasure hidden in a field, etc. We have to explore those things, because He left treasures hidden in all those little cracks and crevasses for our instruction.

He must have brooded over these things so that keys, directions, and instructions would be left for us, so that we could consider the things that were spoken, and His Father could stimulate prophecy to come forth from it. Through this we can respond, and the secret can actually come out of the words and become a life that brings forth the sprout that grows into the tree.

A mustard seed just does what a seed does. It doesn't consider

how everything is going to happen, "Okay, how is it going to happen? I'm just a tiny little seed, and there's this stuff inside of me, and then there's dirt over there, and there's this stuff inside of the dirt. Okay, let me see whether I can figure out how it's all going to work for this tree thing to come about... But, no, I don't see it! The tree is just not going to happen. I may as well just sit here on the pavement and bake in the sun as a stubborn, rebellious mustard seed."

A spirit of worthlessness can come to each one of us. Yahshua made comparisons like this so many times in order to speak to men's hearts. With the mustard seed there are forces at work that we don't understand. But there's one thing that we can understand: A seed is worthless unless it goes into the

ground and dies. You may look at a seed and say, "What good is this thing anyway?" But in the purpose of that seed we can understand the greatest question that the entire world wonders: What am I created for?

The answer is there in that little mustard seed. We're created to go into the ground and die. And if we do, amazing things can happen through things that we just can't understand. There are forces at work in the soil and in the air. Amazing things can take place through the simple obedience of the seed just doing what it's created to do. It's so encouraging that it's that way. That tiny little insignificant nothing... it's a very uncomplicated structure, but it goes into the ground and dies, and amazing things come forth. ❧



## Not so Impressive to the Natural Eye

now is resistible. You can resist it if you want to; you can shun it. God made it that way because He only wants the pure heart of man. He doesn't want anything except a pure, loving heart for our Creator. Those are the only people who are going to bring in that Kingdom — those who love Him with all their heart, soul, and strength.

So the Kingdom now is resistible. The men of the earth can resist it. But the day will come when they won't be able to resist it. It's going to come and flatten everything out. Then Yahshua will reign supreme, and we'll rule with Him over the nations — on the earth and then the universe.<sup>16</sup>

Our Father is going to have His will done by a people who do His will in this age. We may think we can just say, "Father, your will be done." When I was young, I had to pray it in school

every day. But we didn't have an iota of understanding about it. It was just something we memorized. But when we pray, "Father, your will be done," that means, "Give us the power and the strength and the grace to do it, to bring it about." That's what it means. "Deliver us from the evil one."

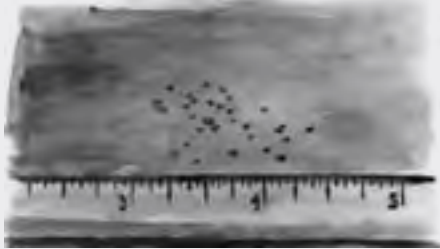
All those who are falling into sin are not praying to be delivered from evil. They could care less about His Kingdom. They aren't praying to be delivered. If we pray to be delivered from evil, do you think our Father is not going to deliver us? Of course, He's going to deliver us! That's what He wants to do! If we say, "Deliver us from evil" and evil comes upon us, what is that? It doesn't make sense.

We're chosen as Abraham was chosen. All the seed of Abraham are chosen. Why are we chosen? We are

chosen that we would command our children.<sup>17</sup> Parents are to command their children or they're not the seed of Abraham. And the children are to be commandable. And the outcome of that is to bring about what God had promised Abraham. We have to bring about the promise of the enemy-free land for Abraham's natural offspring. Then the Kingdom will come and be established in the next age, and all the apostles will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel in the next age. Who's going to bring it about? It's not going to just happen out of the blue. It's going to take a people who will put all of Yahshua's enemies under His feet<sup>19</sup> and crush the head of the serpent. 🐍

<sup>16</sup> Revelation 21:24, 22:2 <sup>17</sup> Genesis 18:19  
<sup>18</sup> Matthew 19:28 <sup>19</sup> Hebrews 10:13; Acts 3:21

### "Who do you think you are, anyway?"



How small and insignificant the mustard seed is! It's so small that even a bug or a bird wouldn't notice it. And that little seed doesn't have faith in itself when it goes into the ground. Surely it doesn't think, "I may look small now, but you watch, in a few years I'm going to be really big." It just goes into the ground and does what it's supposed to do, and it becomes a huge tree.

As a seed, it didn't feel a lot of worth in its own greatness. It probably sat down there on the ground, looking at the huge things around it, and felt really small. But Yahshua said that *the Kingdom of Heaven is going to be like that*. He was comparing something as vast as the Kingdom of Heaven to something as tiny as the tiniest seed.

He must have felt as small as a

mustard seed Himself at times. And His followers were just a little rag-tag bunch of men that were barely making it. They had not gone to any fancy schools, or even studied much at all. Yet Yahshua had the sense that the whole universe was resting upon His shoulders, and upon those who would follow Him. And who was He? He was just nothing but a mustard seed.

Maybe one of those little seeds just happened to have been caught in a gust of wind that blew by Yahshua as He sat there, considering these deep things. And He picked it up on His finger and examined its smallness. He may have thought, "Oh, this little insignificant seed..." And then came that horrible, depressing doubt from the evil one, "So, who do you think you are, anyway? What high hopes do you have? You are as insignificant as that little mustard seed! Give up now; you'll never become a tree. You talk about the universe and the stars, righteousness and ruling, many awesome things, but who do you think you are? You're just nothing!"

But somehow that little seed just

does what little seeds do, and ends up turning into a great and mighty tree. One plants, another one waters, but it's God who makes it grow.<sup>1</sup> So all the little seed has to do is be obedient and fall into the ground and die. That's all. There is no way he could get organized enough to plan out how he's going to become the huge tree that he wants to be. He just has to die. And then the Father makes him into what he's destined to be.

It is so enlightening that Yahshua compared the Kingdom of Heaven to a mustard seed. I'm sure He looked around at His rag-tag bunch of followers and wondered sometimes. It got very hard for them, and He saw Peter puzzling, and John struggling, and people falling away, and at one point He said to them, "Are you going to leave Me, too?" But they said, "Where would we go? You are the only one who has the words of eternal life."

And so there they were — just a little, tiny mustard seed... 🐍

<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:6

# The INCUMBENCY

## Who are the “Nicolaitans” mentioned in the Scriptures and why are they so detrimental to the health of the Body?

“And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.”

(Matthew 24:14)

So what is the good news of the kingdom, and how can it be proclaimed as a testimony to all the nations? A *testimony* or *witness* is the presentation of evidence or proof of something from one’s first-hand experience. A *kingdom* is the domain of a king — where his commands are obeyed and his subjects enjoy his provision and protection. The *good news* is that the good King of this kingdom rescued us from slavery to the evil king of this present darkness, and put His love (i.e., His Spirit) in our hearts so that we could love one another the same way He loved us. So to proclaim this good news as a *witness* or *testimony* to the nations is for the King’s subjects to make their first-hand experience of His love visible to the surrounding world by living together in love and unity:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

“The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.” (John 17:22-23)

If this were ever to be done throughout the world over a period of several generations with increasing rather than decreasing zeal and consistency, it would bring about the



end of the age, the *Jubilee*,<sup>1</sup> for then Yahshua, the good King, could return to righteously judge all those who despised the demonstration of His rule and persecuted His people. But this demonstration can only come about by His people being devoted to it, as Paul urged:

*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)*

Except for a short time in the first century when the church was as described in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-35, this has never been done. Love left and doctrine took over. But since love is the Spirit,<sup>2</sup> which fulfills the Law,<sup>3</sup> so shall love also produce the right doctrine. However, doctrine does not, can not, never has, nor ever will produce love.

It all began with Romans 5:5,

*Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in*

*our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

and 1 John 2:15 and 3:17 is how it all stopped:

*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ... Whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?*

Since the first century the world has not seen the love of 1 John 3:16 and John 13:34-35, which makes the unity of John 17:23 happen. Acts 2 and

4 is what must be restored, and this takes a community, and a community takes love, and God is this kind of love, without which it is a useless endeavor done only in man’s own strength and ingenuity, i.e., *the flesh*. For true community to happen, the flesh must be crucified, which is what Yahshua was talking about when He said,

*“Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it.”*

(Mark 8:34-35)

This is the secret no one knows except those who know they have passed out of eternal death and into eternal life:

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” (John 5:24)*

Christians quote this verse, but they don’t quote the *litmus test*<sup>4</sup> that goes with it:

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 61:1-2, as the ultimate prophetic fulfillment of Leviticus 25:8-10 <sup>2</sup> 1 John 4:8 <sup>3</sup> Romans 8:4 <sup>4</sup> See *The Litmus Test* on page 40.

We know that we have passed out of death and into life because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death... By this we know love: that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. (1 John 3:14,16)

If anyone says, "I love God," and hates [i.e., does not love] his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. (1 John 4:20)

When disciples are laying down their lives for one another in love, they have confidence from the Holy Spirit<sup>5</sup> that they have passed out of death and into life, therefore they are outspoken in the gatherings, for that life bubbles out of them continually in thanksgiving and encouragement.<sup>6</sup> Obviously, the Apostle Paul expected the churches under his care to be characterized by the full participation of every disciple:

What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, another language, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. (1 Corinthians 14:26)

There were no professional preachers, musicians, or choir directors. As Paul told the Ephesians, he also expected this full participation, motivated by love, to characterize their whole lives, whether in the gatherings or not:

Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every aspect [of our personality] into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:15-16)

Paul's last exhortation to the church in Ephesus was, "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible, undying love."<sup>8</sup> Yet less than 40 years later, Yahshua Himself had this to say to that same church: "I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first."<sup>9</sup> It didn't take long before the corruption set in hard and fast, expressing the incumbency of the Nicolaitan system — the system that God hates.<sup>10</sup>



### The Incumbency: Church Politics

Incumbency is the period during which an office is held. It is a well-known fact of the political process that it is hard to unseat an incumbent office-holder. Once someone attains to a position of power or influence, it can be very difficult to remove him from office because he uses his power and influence to make the people dependent on him. As it is in politics, so it became in the church.

The word *Nicolaitan* is derived from *nikao*, meaning "to conquer," and *laos*, meaning "people," hence, "people conquerors." In the waning years of the first century church, as their love grew cold, most grew silent while leaders rose up and filled the vacuum with their persuasive and eloquent monologues.<sup>11</sup> It was just as Paul had warned the Ephesian elders:

I know that after my departure

fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. (Acts 20:29-30)

Already, by the end of the first century, the Nicolaitan system had appeared in Ephesus<sup>12</sup> and had made significant headway in Pergamum.<sup>13</sup> It was an evil system of Satan which infiltrated the church.<sup>14</sup> When the last of the overcomers<sup>15</sup> died, there was

no longer a way for the Holy Spirit to express Himself.<sup>16</sup> Messiah was no longer the head over that house,<sup>17</sup> where the common people had lost their love and outspokenness:

But Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. (Hebrews 3:6)

The Greek word for *confidence* means outspokenness, freedom, even unreservedness of speech. When that ceased, according to the Word of God, Christ ceased being the High Priest over that silent house.

Nicolaitanism was a creeping doctrine coming from the incumbency of those who saw leadership not as the Master had taught,<sup>18</sup> but as a position to hold. To incubate their self-perpetuating eggs they led the pew-sitters to sit contentedly on them until they hatched — a brood of serpents, just as the leaders of the Jews had been called by John the Baptist.<sup>19</sup> To hatch these Nicolaitan eggs took the artificial heat needed to maintain the ideal temperature for the optimal growth and development of bacterial cultures — *lukewarm*.<sup>20</sup>

Incubation is the period of time between the exposure to an infectious disease and the appearance of the symptoms. To sit on eggs is to foster incubation. The church itself became

<sup>5</sup> 1 John 3:24 <sup>6</sup> John 7:37-39; 1 Peter 4:11 <sup>7</sup> The five aspects of our personality are: physical, spiritual, mental, emotional, and social. <sup>8</sup> Ephesians 6:24 <sup>9</sup> Revelation 2:4 <sup>10</sup> Revelation 2:6,15 <sup>11</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:3-6 <sup>12</sup> Revelation 2:6 <sup>13</sup> Revelation 2:15 <sup>14</sup> 1 John 4:1-5; John 12:26; 14:18,20 <sup>15</sup> Revelation 3:4-5 <sup>16</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:16 <sup>17</sup> James 1:26-27; 2:19; Revelation 2:5; Romans 11:22 <sup>18</sup> Luke 22:25-27 <sup>19</sup> Matthew 3:7 <sup>20</sup> Revelation 3:16



an incubator by its lukewarmness. An incubator is an apparatus kept at uniform warmth as by a lamp for the artificial hatching of these Nicolaitan eggs that Satan laid right before their undiscerning spirits.

This Nicolaitan system was finally inculcated into the church by pressing it on their minds through repetition by frequent lectures and admonitions, until it was finally instilled into their minds.<sup>21</sup> The churches had become accustomed to listening to only one person instead of benefiting from the full participation of each member.<sup>22</sup>

So the one incumbent Nicolaitan in each church, who had arisen by smooth talk and manipulation,<sup>23</sup> tenaciously held onto his office and performed his official duties as an autocrat,<sup>24</sup> putting out of the church any who were a threat to his position. The Apostle John wrote of this in his second letter:

*I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church. (3 John 1:9-10)*

Such incumbents encumber the sincere, hindering any action or motion toward godliness by imposing unreasonable burdens to bolster their own ego<sup>25</sup> — Satan's pride, the Nicolaitan spirit God hates.<sup>26</sup>

The Kingdom was shut out by the encumbering incumbents,<sup>27</sup> and only a few overcomers were left,<sup>28</sup> and they were probably put out of the church. The teachings of the Nicolaitans became an incurable deadly disease that killed the first church, spreading like

gangrene or cancer, incurable, with no hope of reformation.<sup>29</sup> So it suffered from an incurable disease until it died, due to the incumbency of the devouring spirit of the evil one. Then came Constantine, when the fallen church was ripe for the picking.

The people were silenced due to the overwhelming insurgency<sup>30</sup> of the incumbent Nicolaitans, Satan's servants.<sup>31</sup> This ecclesiastical system was received by a passive laity due to the persuasion of the incumbent ones, the authority falling to them by default — the failure of the many to accept the responsibility of their priesthood. Due to the general lack of wisdom, understanding, discernment, insight, discretion, and faithfulness to pray to be delivered from evil,<sup>32</sup> the church was taken captive. None who joined from that time on received the Holy Spirit, but all the while they claimed to see.<sup>33</sup>

They could memorize John 5: 24 quite well, and were mesmerized by John 3:16, but were strangely unconcerned with 1 John 3:16, since the kind of believing that resulted in Acts 2:44 was out of the question. (Yet Acts 2:44 remains the standard for all generations for all who believe with the kind of belief that John 3: 16 is speaking of.) So by the second century, James was regarded by them as the insurgent one, since he had the audacity to write to the church, "You believe that God is one; you do

well. Even the demons believe — and shudder!"<sup>34</sup>

Nightfall descended upon the true way to life, and the fallen incumbency has held the reigns of power for almost 1900 years. They forsook their roots in the ancient Hebrew faith,<sup>35</sup> the Jerusalem pattern of full participation,<sup>36</sup> even abandoning the original Hebrew name of the Messiah, *Yahshua*, meaning "Yahweh's Salvation."<sup>37</sup> Instead, they adopted the Greek name *Iesous Christos* and became known as *Christianity*, characterized by a professional clergy and a largely passive laity. Little or no participation or accountability was required of its members beyond their attendance and their tithes, and their assent to a doctrinal creed.<sup>38</sup> The resulting rampant hypocrisy grieves the few who still long for the vibrant life of the first-century church.

But there is Good News! That life is sprouting again on the earth! Anyone who is willing to do God's will can become a full participant in the way of life of our good King, *Yahshua*, the Messiah. It is a life based not on doctrine but on love, following the ancient pattern of the early church. We invite you to depose the incumbency of dead religion in your own life and join the true commonwealth where everyone has a voice and a vocation to give their all in building up the witness of the coming Kingdom as a foretaste of the age to come. 🙏



<sup>21</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:4,15 <sup>22</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:26; Hebrews 3:6; 1 Peter 4:11; 1 Corinthians 11:5 <sup>23</sup> Acts 20:30 <sup>24</sup> Autocrat — a ruler who has absolute power; a domineering person. <sup>25</sup> Matthew 23:4 <sup>26</sup> Revelation 2:6,15 <sup>27</sup> Matthew 23:13 <sup>28</sup> Revelation 3:4 <sup>29</sup> It is futile to try to reform something that is dead, which is all the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century did. There was no restoration of the life of the first-century church, but merely a reformation of the apostate religion of dead ritual. *Apostate* means departed from the apostles' teaching to which the first disciples were devoted (Acts 2:42). <sup>30</sup> Insurgent — *adj.*, rising in active revolt; *n.*, a rebel or revolutionary <sup>31</sup> 3 John 1:9; 2 Corinthians 11:3,4,13-15 <sup>32</sup> Matthew 6:13 <sup>33</sup> John 9:41; 1 John 2:4 <sup>34</sup> James 2:19; See also the article, *The Insurgent*, on the following page <sup>35</sup> Romans 11:17-21 <sup>36</sup> Acts 2:42-47; 1 Thessalonians 2:14 <sup>37</sup> For more about this name, see *The Name Above All Names*, page 62 <sup>38</sup> See also *The Shift from Community Life to Doctrine*, page 23



# the Insurgent

(The First Radical Pamphlet in Christian History and Why Martin Luther Reviled It)

**T**hey call it the Epistle of James. It is found near the end of the New Testament. Tradition says the author was “the brother of the Lord” and that he wrote it to the Jews living outside Judea. Most scholars date it within 30 years of the founding of the Church. Many say it was written as early as 45 AD.

Tradition is a powerful force, isn't it? It often carries more influence than common sense. If you are one who places more weight on tradition than on common sense, please don't bother reading this article. But if you consider yourself a free thinker, then please consider this, as well:

Most assumptions about the Book of James are wrong. They are neither based on the letter itself nor on hard historical evidence. And worst of all, these fallacies aren't just the result of ignorance — they are attempts to deny and conceal a dirty little secret. But we'll discuss that later. First, let's consider the objective evidence.

### Who Wrote It and When

The author only refers to himself as “James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Beyond this, he makes no reference to his own identity, or authority, or place of residence, as Paul, Peter, and John do in their letters. Christian tradition presumes him to be “the brother of the Lord” based simply on another presumption of Christian tradition — that everything in the New Testament must have been written by an apostle or a bishop or somebody important in the clergy. And Christian tradition further presumes that the clergy-laity system was part of the foundation of the early Church.

Of course, we can tell from what Paul wrote that a distinction between clergy and laity was foreign to the early Church.<sup>1</sup> According to Paul, all disciples were expected to take their identity as priests seriously and to bring to each gathering a song, a teaching, a revelation, and so on, and he encouraged all the disciples to prophesy. This is supported by Hebrews 3:6, which tells us that the defining

characteristic of God's house is something translated as “confidence” — the *parrhesia* (literally “outspokenness” or “freedom of speech”) of the people.

So there is no reason, other than the traditions of the clergy-laity system, to think of the writer James as being an apostle or even a leader in the early Church. There is every reason to believe that, like many of the Old Testament prophets, he rose from obscurity, moved by the Holy Spirit to express his concerns.

The usual date assigned to the writing (45-63 AD) is also a presumption, based on the presumption that James, “the Lord's brother” (who is supposed to have been killed around 63 AD), is the author. Some scholars have objected to an early date, arguing that the spiritual condition James addresses is such a stark contrast with the fervor of the disciples at the time of Pentecost. Others reason that the sins he mentions “could have been found in the Church at any decade of its history” — a remarkable rationalization which we will address shortly. First, though, let's consider who received this “epistle.”

### Who It Was Written To

The opening sentence says, “to the twelve tribes scattered abroad.” The traditional take on this phrase is that “the Lord's brother” wrote a general letter to all the Jews who lived outside of Judea — as if they would have read a letter from someone in a despised sect that was spoken against everywhere.<sup>2</sup> But there is a problem with presuming that these “twelve tribes” are the physical tribes of Israel. You see, only the two tribes of the Babylonian captivity, Judah and Benjamin, along with a few Levites, retained any identity as Israelites. The other ten tribes, taken captive by Assyria, had been swallowed up by the surrounding cultures, and it would have been impossible to address a letter to them. Besides, the term “twelve tribes” would hardly refer to the Jews (technically, only one tribe), and could scarcely be applied to Jewish believers (comprising only a small percentage of that tribe).

Actually, other references in the New Testament make it clear that the term “twelve tribes” referred to the whole Church — a spiritual nation made up of both physical Jews and physical Gentiles. For example, the “Bride of Christ” in Revelation is pictured as a city with twelve



gates, each gate being one of the twelve tribes of Israel.<sup>3</sup> Also, in Paul's trial before King Agrippa<sup>4</sup> he said that, in order to attain the promise made to Abraham, the "twelve tribes" that Paul was part of were earnestly serving God night and day — and this was why the Jews (obviously not part of the tribes he referred to) were accusing him.

Given the objective evidence, it is clear that the "twelve tribes" James was writing to was identical with the "Commonwealth of Israel" of Ephesians 2:12, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, who had been made into one nation by the blood of Messiah. But there were some problems in the commonwealth, and that is what moved James to write.

### Why He Wrote It

James saw that the new nation<sup>5</sup> — the one Messiah had purchased with the sacrifice of His own life<sup>6</sup> — was on the verge of being destroyed. Those who had been united through the cleansing power of His blood were now becoming alienated from one another, because His blood was no longer covering their sins. And the reason their sins were not being covered was that they were no longer confessing and forsaking their sins.<sup>7</sup> The Church was in deep trouble — and it wasn't just one or two communities, such as Corinth or Laodicea, it was the whole nation (the twelve tribes).<sup>8</sup> There was a shocking contrast between the condition of the Church that James was writing to and the quality of the life the disciples lived at the time of Pentecost.

Unlike the congregation described in Acts 4:32, who were all of "one heart and soul," James portrayed a Church that was splintered by quarrels and conflicts,<sup>9</sup> largely as a result of the poor members envying the rich.<sup>10</sup> That envy was based in part on the failure of the prosperous to meet the needs of the less prosperous,<sup>11</sup> but both the envy of the poor and



the self-centeredness of the rich could be traced to friendship with and love for the world,<sup>12</sup> which James flatly condemned as spiritual adultery. Not only were the prosperous neglecting the needs of others, but the poor were being slighted socially, while the rich were lavished with attention. James rebuked this practice as inconsistent with having faith in Messiah.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the sins of the affluent, James did not justify those who were envious of them. He condemned both bitter jealousy and selfish ambition as demonic,<sup>14</sup> especially when those attitudes resulted in defaming their fellow disciples.<sup>15</sup>

To those who would not bridle their tongue, but hypocritically blessed God while cursing men made in His image, James declared their religion to be worthless.<sup>16</sup> Still, he reserved his harshest words for those who stored up riches, especially by unjust means:

*Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days... (James 5:1-5)*

The topic that James is best remembered for, however, is that of faith versus works. But it wasn't just a general doctrinal subject that he addressed with theological detachment. He was specifically attacking the lack of love in the Church that spawned their favoritism toward the rich and neglect of the needy.<sup>17</sup>

He was alarmed to find so rare those *works of love* which had been so common in the Church's infancy. He was appalled at the complacency of those who failed to meet their brother's needs while still professing to have faith.<sup>18</sup>

He even boldly challenged their claim of being saved.<sup>19</sup> So-called faith, without *works of love*, was to James not only useless,<sup>20</sup> but also dead.<sup>21</sup> It was due to these passages that Martin Luther called it an "epistle of straw."<sup>22</sup>

The scenario painted by James is so



vastly different from the portrait of the Church in the book of Acts that it leads the reader to wonder whether the two writings were actually talking about the same group. In Acts, the brethren were devoted to the teachings of the apostles, were together, in fellowship with each other, were of one mind, one heart, and one soul, gladly ate their meals together, shared everything they had, and even sold their possessions to meet the needs of their brothers, to the point that none among them were needy.<sup>23</sup> In James, however, the brethren heard the apostles' teaching but did not do it,<sup>24</sup> were continually traveling from town to town in search of financial gain,<sup>25</sup> were divided along economic lines,<sup>26</sup> and even defamed and quarreled with each other because of the economic injustice in their midst.<sup>27</sup>

The Church that James was writing to had degenerated far beyond the condition of the individual churches addressed elsewhere in the New Testament. Paul's letters to the Corinthians (written around 55 AD) spoke of the foolishness and carnality of an immature community, but gave clear direction what they must do in order to grow up. John's letters to the churches in the book of Revelation (written around 90 AD) pointed out the things each one

<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:26-32 <sup>2</sup> Acts 28:22 <sup>3</sup> Revelation 21:9-12 <sup>4</sup> Acts 26:6-7 <sup>5</sup> Matthew 21:43; 24:14; 1 Peter 2:9; James 1:1; Acts 26:7; Isaiah 49:6; as Malachi 1:5,11 shows, that new nation was to make His name great in every place beyond the borders of Israel <sup>6</sup> Revelation 5:9-10 <sup>7</sup> 1 John 1:9; Proverbs 28:13 <sup>8</sup> The nation of Matthew 21:43; see also Mark 9:11,12 <sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:10-13 <sup>10</sup> James 4:1-3 <sup>11</sup> James 2:14-17 <sup>12</sup> James 4:4 <sup>13</sup> James 2:1-13 <sup>14</sup> James 3:14-16 <sup>15</sup> James 4:11; 5:9 <sup>16</sup> James 1:26; 3:8-12 <sup>17</sup> James 2:8-10 <sup>18</sup> James 2:19-20 <sup>19</sup> James 2:14-17 <sup>20</sup> James 2:20 <sup>21</sup> James 2:17,26 <sup>22</sup> See "The Epistle of Straw" in *The Litmus Test* on page 42 <sup>23</sup> Acts 2:42-46; 4:32-35 <sup>24</sup> James 1:22; 4:17 <sup>25</sup> James 4:13 <sup>26</sup> James 2:2-4 <sup>27</sup> James 4:1 - 5:9



was faithful in, as well as the things they had fallen away from, and once again, called each church to heed the specific warnings and mend its ways or else face the consequences. James, however, was writing unilaterally to all the churches, addressing a spiritual condition virtually identical to that of the Pharisaical Judaism the Son of God had called His followers out from. For the Church to have reached that state, James could not have been writing before the beginning of the second century AD.

### **General Epistle or Underground Tract?**

Unlike the writings of Paul and John, which gave authoritative direction to specific churches, James only stated the general problems and made an appeal to *individual* disciples to obey the commandments of their Master if they found themselves in those situations. It is as if James had no hope of calling the Church back to the *deeds of love* that characterized the Church at Pentecost. John, on the other hand, specifically commanded the Ephesians<sup>28</sup> to repent and do the *deeds of love* they had done in the beginning, for if they did not, their lampstand (their validity before God as a church) would be taken away. But James did not try to keep any lampstands lit. Things had degenerated beyond that point, and all he could do was simply warn the *rich men*<sup>29</sup> in the congregations (he did not refer to them as *brothers*) about the judgment coming upon them and appeal to each of the *brothers*<sup>30</sup> who were oppressed by them to bear their sufferings patiently and be true to the commands of the Master.

It is obvious from the context that the sins James was confronting had become *accepted practices* within the Church. It made him so distraught that he wrote down the burden of his heart and began distributing the document to the entire Church. And so, rather than being a “general epistle” by someone in authority, the “Epistle of James” is clearly more of an “underground manuscript” exposing the problems that the shepherds and elders and overseers had turned a blind eye to. James himself, rather than holding the prestigious position of “the Lord’s

brother,” was more of an insurgent — not outwardly belligerent against the hierarchy of the compromising Church, but inwardly revolting against their accepted policies. It’s not hard to imagine the outrage among the rich and prosperous which this little essay generated originally — back when it wasn’t tucked away in the back of the Bible and watered down by commentaries. Just think what would happen if you stood up in the midst of a worship service and read aloud his condemnation of the rich.<sup>31</sup>

### **Why They Got It Wrong**

Someone may ask, “So if James was really an obscure outsider in the second century, grieved by sins the Church was tolerating, why don’t most people see it that way, and how did his writings become part of the Bible?” The second question is the simplest to answer: James is part of the Bible because it is almost entirely a restatement of Messiah’s teachings. It had to become part of the canon because it is so utterly orthodox. The first question takes a little more explanation.

Recall that some commentators claimed that the sins James spoke of “could have been found in the Church at any decade of its history.” There was a reason for that rationalization: To admit that backbiting, defamation, favoritism, quarrels, and (most of all) divisions between rich and poor were not part of the status quo in the first century Church would raise a very uncomfortable question: “Why have they been the status quo throughout the rest of Christian history?”

It is very convenient, even comforting, to claim that James was “the Lord’s brother” writing in 45 AD. That would mean that the obvious deeds of the flesh<sup>32</sup> were running rampant through the Church scarcely a decade after it was founded. And if the Lord’s brother could do no more about it than moan weakly, “these things ought not to be this way,” then that lets the rest of us off the hook, doesn’t it? If this is the way it has always been, then this is the way it will always be, because the flesh is just too strong and human nature is too warped to do anything

about it. The obvious conclusion: “All we can do is just have faith in the Lord and wait ’til we get to heaven.”

Most people are content to accept such rationalizations and cover up the “dirty little secret” that the whole Church fell away from the faith around the end of the first century. Most people miss the fact that James tells us twice<sup>33</sup> that “faith” without works is dead, once that such “faith” is useless,<sup>34</sup> and once that such “faith” cannot save a person.<sup>35</sup> They eagerly agree with him that “no man can tame the tongue,”<sup>36</sup> but overlook his comment that if a man does not bridle his tongue,<sup>37</sup> then his religion is completely worthless. But not all people are quite that dull. Martin Luther wasn’t. What James said about bridling the tongue irked him, because Luther was never one to control his tongue. What James said about works being the proof of faith especially irked Luther, because it messed up his pet theory that “faith alone” was all God required. That is why Luther called James an “epistle of straw.”

Hopefully, you who read this will be as perceptive as Luther, but rather than rejecting what James had to say about works, you will understand the implications of it. Consider what happened to the false “faith” that had taken over the Church in James’ day and failed to produce the works of love that were normal for all disciples when the Church began. Did it go away? Was it replaced by a resurgence of the self-denying love that motivated the believers at Pentecost? Hasn’t the bad fruit of that “faith” only gotten worse over the last nineteen centuries, in spite of reformations and counter-reformations and countless so-called revivals? Instead, isn’t it time for the restoration of the life of love that resulted from the message of the apostles? The “faith” that has been passed down to us by organized religion is none other than the false “faith” James was exposing — a “faith” that cannot save. Only if we can realize this do we have any hope of being delivered from a worthless religion where such “faith” is the norm and brought back to the true faith that turned the world upside down.<sup>38</sup> 🙏

<sup>28</sup> Revelation 2:4-5 <sup>29</sup> James 1:10 <sup>30</sup> James 1:9 <sup>31</sup> James 5:1-3 <sup>32</sup> Galatians 5:19-21 <sup>33</sup> James 2:17,26 <sup>34</sup> James 2:20 <sup>35</sup> James 2:14 <sup>36</sup> James 3:8 <sup>37</sup> James 1:26 <sup>38</sup> Acts 17:6

*Thoughtful people have long struggled in the face of the Christian doctrine of Heaven and Hell, causing them to consider the destiny of the countless millions of people who have never had the opportunity to hear about Jesus.*



# What about the Heathen?

*Are all men doomed to eternal death who have never heard the gospel?*

This question looms in the minds of many Christians, and the classic answer, at least from the Calvinist camp, makes God out to be a vindictive<sup>1</sup> monster: *all men are born totally depraved, worthy of eternal damnation regardless of how they live their lives or whether they have ever heard of Jesus Christ.*

We utterly reject this misrepresentation of God's justice and would like to set the record straight from the Holy Scriptures. While it is *not* possible for a man to work his way to heaven, it is also *not* true that he is doomed to eternal death regardless of how he lives his life. What *is* the truth about man's eternal destiny?

First of all, it is true that when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command in the Garden of Eden and ate the forbidden fruit, they incurred the sentence of death:

*And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."*

(Genesis 2:16-17)

Their physical death was not immediate, but their spiritual death was, and their fallen condition was passed on to their offspring, as the record shows, "for all have

<sup>1</sup> *vindictive* — disposed to seek revenge; showing malicious ill will and a desire to hurt; motivated by spite.

<sup>2</sup> Romans 3:23

<sup>3</sup> Romans 6:23

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 9:27

<sup>5</sup> There is a judgment of believers that Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 5:10 and 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, but its purpose is to determine who is worthy to rule with Christ during the Millennial Age. This judgment takes place at Christ's return, 1000 years before the so-called "Great White Throne" judgment. But the eternal destiny of true believers is sealed according to Ephesians 1:13-14.

<sup>6</sup> The "cowardly and unbelieving" in Revelation 21:8 are those who *willfully rejected* the gospel as John 3:18,36 describes, not those who *never heard* the gospel. But some Christians will say there is no excuse, because if anyone were really sincere, God would send a missionary to him, even in the remotest corner of China. Rightly did our Master say of such self-righteous judges: "Woe to you, for you travel over land and sea to win one convert, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves!" (Matthew 23:15)

*What about the millions of people who never had the opportunity to hear about Jesus Christ? Are they going to eternal destruction?*

sinned and fall short of the glory of God."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, since "the wages of sin is death,"<sup>3</sup> then "it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment."<sup>4</sup>

This much is clear to most Christians, but what happens after the judgment? This is the part that is widely misunderstood. But remember, the Bible says "it is appointed for men to die *once*..." It doesn't say *twice*. Yet there is a *second* death:

*But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.*  
(Revelation 21:8)

This verse identifies a certain character of people whose destiny will be a second and unending death in the lake of fire. But what about those who are not of that character? That is why there must be a judgment:

*Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged,*

*each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.* (Revelation 20:11-15)

Let's be clear: this is *not* the judgment of *believers* in Christ, for their eternal destiny does not depend on their works.<sup>5</sup> This is the judgment of all those who died *without Christ*. They are raised from the *first* death to be judged as to whether they are worthy of the *second* death, based on how they lived their lives.

Now some will say this judgment is merely a formality — not a judgment at all, but a sentencing. They will say that no one's name was found written in the Book of Life because they didn't believe in Jesus,<sup>6</sup> so all were cast into the lake of fire. They fail to distinguish between this "Book of Life" for the nations and the "Lamb's Book of Life" for the holy nation. They suppose that God raises men from the first death to stand before Him so that He can gloat at them while He pretends to look up their name in the Book of Life, knowing it will not be there. Then He callously casts them into the lake of fire. But this is not God's character.

Abraham, the father of our faith, when he appealed to God to spare the few righteous in Sodom, knew something about the character of God that escapes many Christians today:

*"Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the*





## THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

*wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*" (Genesis 18:25)

Of course Abraham was especially thinking of his nephew Lot, and God heard his plea and rescued Lot and his daughters. Although he was not included in the covenant with Abraham, Lot is described as being *righteous*.<sup>7</sup> And while this passage does not speak of Lot's eternal destiny, but merely his temporal deliverance from the destruction of Sodom, yet it speaks of God's character as understood by Abraham, the *friend of God*.<sup>8</sup>

We stand with Abraham, knowing that God will righteously judge all people according to their works, and not just throw them all willy-nilly into the lake of fire. Those who are not *worthy* of the second death will be granted a second life, and it is over them that Messiah and His Bride (those who have truly believed in Him) will rule throughout eternity.<sup>9</sup>

Now let's take a closer look at the basis of this judgment:

*"Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil..."*

(Genesis 3:22)

After Adam ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would have to live by that knowledge, choosing to do the good and not to do the evil. Even though fallen man could not do this perfectly, God still held him accountable to exercise his will to overcome the temptation to do evil, just as He told Cain:

<sup>7</sup> 2 Peter 2:7-8

<sup>8</sup> 2 Chr 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23

<sup>9</sup> Revelation 22:3-5

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 3:16-19

<sup>11</sup> *intrinsic* — belonging to a thing by its very nature.

<sup>12</sup> *inherent* — existing as an essential constituent or characteristic; in the nature of something.

<sup>13</sup> Rev 21:8; 22:15; Romans 1:28-32

<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 64:6

<sup>15</sup> Romans 10:13-17

*"If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."* (Genesis 4:7)

Of course, Cain did not master it, but all are not like Cain. All do not murder. All are not immoral. Many strive to do the good they know in their conscience, and are grieved when they fail, and do everything possible to make restitution when they do wrong. These have a natural righteousness of their own, a natural faith or persuasion that God is good and that He will judge all men justly. They

who would fail to respect His image in his fellow man to the point of committing murder. But beyond that, God commissioned Noah and his sons after the flood to be fruitful and multiply abundantly on the earth. If man was now worthless and totally depraved, why would a loving Creator want to fill the earth with such creatures?

So fallen man still bears the image of his Creator and retains intrinsic<sup>11</sup> worth to the degree that he lives by the knowledge of good and evil, inherent<sup>12</sup> in his conscience. Even though he has an in-born inclination to sin, he is able and accountable to do the good that he knows

*Far be it from you to slay the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and wicked alike.*

*Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?* (GENESIS 18:25)

value the dignity of life. They recognize the image of the Creator in His creation. They work hard and are faithful in their marriages.<sup>10</sup> They labor to put their values into their children. They bear suffering without growing bitter. They try to keep a good conscience. And God does not despise their efforts.

True, all men sin and fall short of the glory of God, but not all fall *utterly* short. Glory means weight or value. Adam, before he fell, had great value, having been made in God's image. When he fell, God's image in him was marred, but not obliterated. This is very clear from what God said *after* Adam's fall, and in fact even after the Flood:

*"Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man. And you, be fruitful and multiply; abound on the earth and multiply in it."*

(Genesis 9:6-7)

Man still bears God's image and has great value in God's eyes, as He requires capital punishment for any

in his conscience and to keep himself from the kinds of sins that would make him worthy of the second death.<sup>13</sup>

Yet regardless of how careful a man is to live by his conscience, he will not do so perfectly, for he is a fallen creature. He will sin, and his sin must be paid for, as it is an inviolable law that the wages of sin is death. A man's good deeds cannot save him from the consequences of his sin — the first death. His natural righteousness cannot restore him to fellowship with God, nor make him worthy of ruling and reigning with Christ. All of his good deeds are of no more value than filthy rags<sup>14</sup> for obtaining the righteousness of God, which can only be imputed to a man on the basis of faith, which comes from hearing the word of Christ from someone sent to preach the Good News.<sup>15</sup>

So whoever dies without Christ must go to the first death to pay the wages of his own sin, since he does not have a sacrifice for his sins. How then does he pay these wages? It is according to how much worth remains in



*The righteous are not perfect and do sin. Still, they work hard and are faithful in their marriages, abiding by the truth they know in their conscience.*

him, how much integrity and courage he has to face the truth about himself. For in death he is finally alone with his conscience, forced to face his sin, with nowhere to hide and nothing to distract his mind from the awareness of his own guilt. Every evil deed, every base thought, every selfish motive comes out of hiding to torture him. Like a worm burrowing into the recesses of his memory, eating away at his every excuse, so is the path of his thoughts as his conscience fully awakens. The unquenchable fire of his self-inquisition leaves him either weeping in remorse or gnashing his teeth as he resists the truth about himself.<sup>16</sup>

Those who resist the truth, reasoning away their guilt even in death, prove themselves unable to pay sin's wages. They are the same in death as they were in life — set in their ways, their hearts fully hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. A second death awaits them, where they will gnash their teeth eternally. There is a mystery here. King David wrote,

*“From heaven the LORD looks down and sees all mankind; from His dwelling place He watches all who live on earth — He who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do.”*

(Psalm 33:13-15)

The Creator of man forms, fashions, or molds each man's heart according to what he does or gives

himself to. Eventually the heart, like clay, becomes “set” in its way, and so that person's character will remain eternally<sup>17</sup> — some bent towards evil, and some towards good.

The latter, in death, will weep in remorse, accepting the full responsibility for their sins rather than blaming them on others. They are the ones who are able to pay sin's wages. When they are resurrected to stand judgment, they will have fully received the discipline of death and will find mercy and not condemnation. This mercy and comfort will come at the hands of the bride of Messiah, who, according to the Apostle Paul,<sup>18</sup> will be judging the nations on God's behalf. They will wipe away the tears of those who were judged not worthy of the second death:

*“Then I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”*

(Revelation 21:2-4)

The “tabernacle” or “dwelling

place” of God is the bride or *wife* of Messiah,<sup>19</sup> who will dwell with men — the resurrected righteous people of the nations. That is how God Himself will be with them — through the wife of Messiah.<sup>20</sup> Redeemed Man will rule with Messiah over Restored Man,<sup>21</sup> and the original commission given to Adam will be restored to him, once sin and death and the evil one himself are no more.<sup>22</sup>

*“Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”* (Genesis 1:28)

Amazingly, in Psalm 8, King David prophesied that man (both the redeemed and restored man) would rule over all the works of God's hands, including all the galaxies of planets. Surely without death, restored man will quickly fill up the earth and go on to colonize the universe with restored humanity, under the ever-increasing government of God<sup>23</sup> — the redeemed corporate<sup>24</sup> man, which is the wife<sup>25</sup> of Messiah.

So we hope that you can see that there is a lot more in God's heart towards His highest creation, mankind, than to throw countless millions into the lake of fire for the crime of not having been born in the right place and time to hear the true gospel. If you are interested in reading more about man's eternal destiny, please visit our web site, [www.3eternaldestines.org](http://www.3eternaldestines.org). Or better yet, just come and visit one of our communities and we will be more than happy to talk with you.☪

<sup>16</sup> Romans 2:14-16; Matthew 18:34;

Acts 2:24; 1 Corinthians 15:55-56

<sup>17</sup> Revelation 22:11

<sup>18</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:2

<sup>19</sup> Revelation 21:9

<sup>20</sup> Revelation 21:9,12

<sup>21</sup> Revelation 22:5

<sup>22</sup> Revelation 20:10,14

<sup>23</sup> Rev 21:24, NKJV; Isaiah 9:6-7

<sup>24</sup> Corporate — composed of individuals acting together as one entity.

<sup>25</sup> Revelation 21:9,12

# THE NAME ABOVE ALL NAMES

In the days of John the Baptist and the Son of God, the preserved language of the devout Jews in the land of Palestine was Hebrew. So, when the angel Gabriel brought the good news to the Hebrew virgin, Miriam (or *Mary* in English), that she would give birth to the Savior of the world, and told her what His name would be, what language do you suppose he spoke? Hebrew, of course! And certainly Miriam and Yoceph (or *Joseph* in English) named the child just as the angel had commanded them — *Yahshua*.

In Matthew 1:21, your Bible probably reads, "...and you shall call His name *Jesus*, for He will save His people from their sins." But the name *Jesus* is a modern English adaptation of the Greek name, *Iesous*, which is itself a corruption of the original Hebrew name *Yahshua*. The name *Jesus* or *Iesous* has no meaning of its own, but the Hebrew name *Yahshua* literally means *Yahweh's Salvation*,<sup>1</sup> which makes sense out of what the angel said in Matthew 1:21, "...you shall call His name *Yahshua* [Yahweh's Salvation], for He shall save His people from their sins." If you look in an old King James Bible, you will find the name *Jesus* in the following two passages:

*Which also our fathers that came after brought in with **Jesus** into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our*

*fathers, unto the days of David.*

*(Acts 7:45, KJV)*

*For if **Jesus** had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.*

*(Hebrews 4:8, KJV)*

However, if you look in any modern Bible, including some more recently printed King James Bibles, you will find that in place of the name *Jesus* they use the name *Joshua*, for in the context it is clear that it is speaking there of Moses' successor and not the Son of God. But in the Greek manuscript the name in both of these verses is *Iesous*.

You see, *Joshua* is the popular English transliteration<sup>2</sup> of the Hebrew name *Yahshua*. Joshua of the Old Testament had the same name as the One called *Jesus* in the New Testament, for Joshua was the prophetic forerunner of the Son of God, bringing Israel into the Promised Land and leading them to victory over their enemies. But since the translators obviously know this fact, why do they only translate *Iesous* as *Joshua* in these two verses, and as *Jesus* everywhere else?

The NIV New Testament even has a footnote supporting this fact under Matthew 1:21: "*Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua.*"

The fact is, the name of God's Son was not even pronounced as "Jesus" in English until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, simply because there was

no "J" sound or letter in English until then.<sup>3</sup> The modern letter "J" developed from the letter "I" which began to be written with a "tail" when it appeared as the first letter in a capitalized word. So in old English the name now written as *Jesus* was actually written and pronounced much like the original Greek *Iesous*. Eventually the hard "J" sound crept into the English language to accompany the different way of writing the initial "I" in the name.

You may also find it interesting that in Acts 26:14-15, it says that the apostle Paul heard the name of the Son of God pronounced "in the Hebrew tongue" by the Son of God Himself, so he certainly didn't hear the Greek name *Iesous* or the English name *Jesus*, but rather the Hebrew name, the name above all names, *Yahshua*.<sup>4</sup>

Wouldn't it be better to call the Son of God, the Savior, by His true name — the name His own mother, Miriam, and father, Yoceph, and all of His Jewish friends called Him? Not only have we found out what His true Hebrew name is, but we have found His true Body on earth as well.

Please take the time to read the other articles in this paper. You are always welcome to come visit us in any of our communities. Please see the back cover for more about the life we share. ☛

<sup>1</sup> *Yah* is the personal name of God, and *shua* is from a Hebrew root word that means "to save." God identified Himself to Moses as *YAH* (meaning "I AM") in Exodus 3:14, as in Psalm 68:4, KJV ("...by His name *Jah*"), and as most familiar in the word Hallelujah ("Praise Yah"). And in John 5:43 and 17:11, *Yahshua* says that He came in His Father's name, "the name which You have given Me" (NASB), so it is not surprising that the Father's name would be incorporated into the Son's name, *Yahshua*.<sup>2</sup> *transliteration* — expressing words of a language by using the characters of another alphabet. <sup>3</sup> *Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 1496,1507.

<sup>4</sup> Philippians 2:9; Acts 4:12



## Some of our Communities

**EDAH** – The word for community in Hebrew is **edah**, which also means beehive. This word portrays the way a group of people or hive of bees live and work together with a common identity. Bees live a selfless life of devotion to the bee kingdom. They have no concern for themselves but only for the hive and the constant production of honey. So it is with those who are in the communities of God.

### Like a Beehive

Have you ever watched a beehive? It is fascinating seeing thousands of little bees working together to produce honey. As you come near the hive, you can hear an exciting buzz as they go about the many tasks necessary to keep the hive alive. The workers are responsible to collect nectar and guard the hive. The young bees keep the hive in good condition, feed the larvae, and support in other household chores. There is never a dull moment in the busy life of a little bee.

This is much like the life that we have. No matter what we do, we love to do it together. Daily we gather to thank our Master for His salvation, and to hear Him speak to us through one another. This gathering keeps alive a genuine love and care for each other. As we work, we take advantage of the daily situations, guarding ourselves from the selfishness and pride that would come in to separate us and take away our love. Our children are a vital part of our life. We not only educate them, but we work with them to accomplish the simple tasks necessary to maintain a family life. Our life is not a dull routine of chores, but is full of the warmth that comes from the sweet fellowship of friends speaking their hearts to one another, celebrating the Sabbath every week, and participating in weddings and festivals.

But there are a few things that differ in our life from that of a beehive. One is that we are not driven by instinct or controlled by something separate from our own will. Each of us is here because we chose to leave behind our own separate lives to increase the life of this hive. Our life is not enclosed like the hive of a bee, nor do we have a stinger to harm any uninvited guests. We welcome anyone to experience our life with us. Please come and see what it is like to be part of a beehive of people expressing the warmth and love of our Creator. ❀



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