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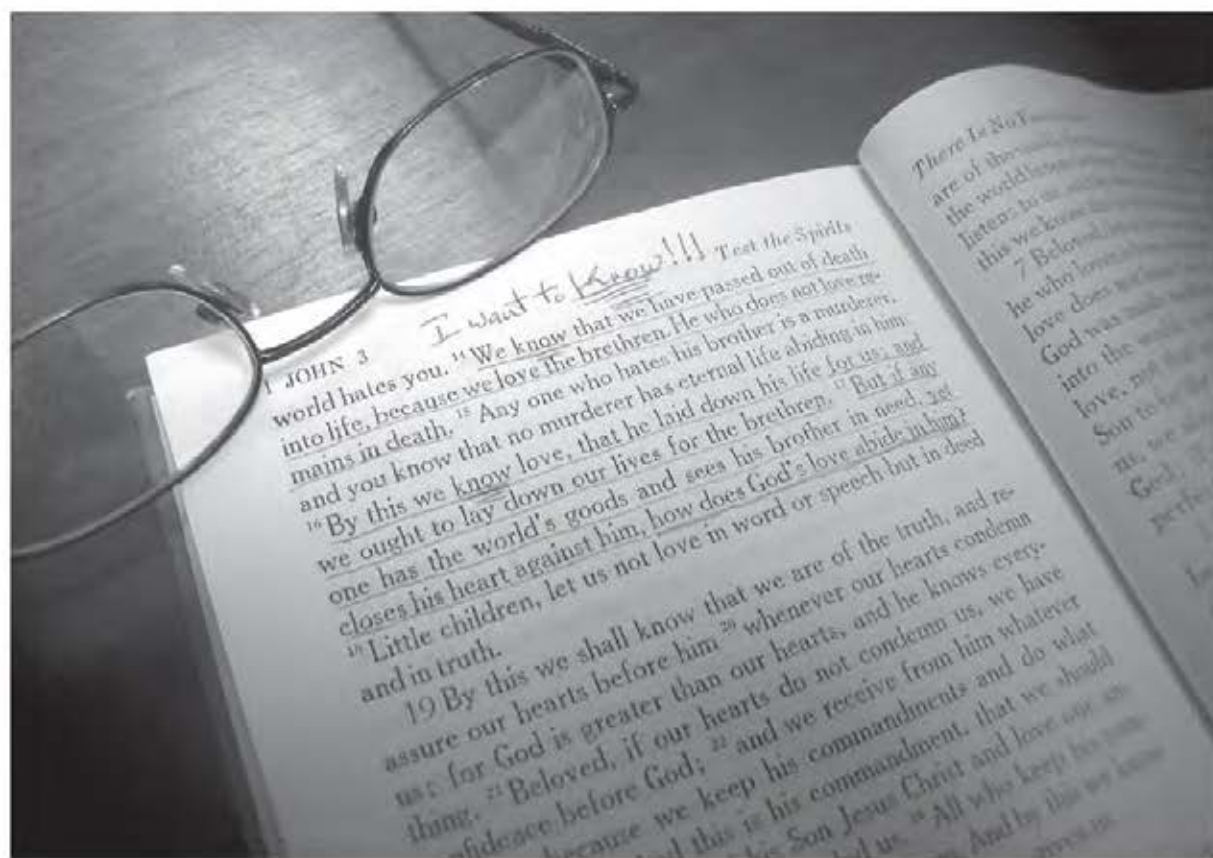
FALL 2004

*still*  
IT TAKES A  
COMMUNITY

A Twelve Tribes Freepaper

All those who believe are together and have all things in common... Acts 2:44

# THE LITMUS TEST



## For Christians Only



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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 say, but passing the litmus test determines whether someone has truly believed *as the Scriptures say*.<sup>1</sup> That's why 1 John was written; its sole purpose was that those who read it could know whether they had actually received saving faith, for the Savior and the apostles knew that people could *believe in vain*.<sup>2</sup>

The litmus test of the book 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 their life, or whether they have only the *concept* of love without the *power* to love. For the apostle Paul said that in the last days that there would be many who would have a form of godliness, yet deny the power.<sup>3</sup>

That's why this little paper may be one of the most important we will ever read. For it brings out and explains the Scriptures that help us to know how we can test<sup>4</sup> ourselves in the light of the Word of God, so we can know for certain whether we have truly passed out of death and into life. We all want to know in our hearts and be assured that we are participating in the same life that the Apostle John and the other early believers shared?<sup>5</sup>


We didn't give up hope when we took the test ourselves. But now we have the assurance of 1 John 3:14,16,23 and 24 because the Spirit bears witness that we are truly loving one another as He commanded us.

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

Oh, that we could all be in verse 35... 

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<sup>1</sup> John 7:38 <sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:2 <sup>3</sup> 2 Timothy 3:5 <sup>4</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:5 <sup>5</sup> Acts 2:44,45; 5:20; 1 John 5:12 (NASB)



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# *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 unathletic 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.

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

"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 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 unshaking 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

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.



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

you who are reading this article. 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

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




*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.*

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 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*



<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?

# WHAT'S IN A NAME



*Some time ago when I was in college, I was searching for something meaningful in life. I wasn't finding it in school. I had been primed all my life to go to college and then on to "life," whatever that meant. Somehow, being one more cog in the machine didn't appeal to me. I wanted true friends and I wanted to do something with my life that really made a difference. I was experiencing neither.*

*A few years earlier in high school, I was at a concert in much of the same state of mind as I would be several years later – lonely and searching for something.*

*When I left the concert someone must have handed me a little paper. It was from some people who lived in a community. This was very interesting to me since I was looking for something like this. However, in the busyness of my life, I put it into my closet and forgot about it.*

*As the years went by, I would see them at many of the events that I went to. They were beginning to capture my interest. One day a friend and I happened to park right behind their big maroon-and-cream-colored bus. On the back it read, "We Know the Way, We'll Bring You Home." I thought to myself, "That's what I want, a real home." As we were sitting there, I asked my friend if he knew anything about them. He answered, "Yeah, they are some community that follows God."*

When he said this, my heart leapt inside. That was what I was looking for – a community where people loved the God of the Bible. So I asked him, "Do they believe in Jesus?"

"No way," was his reply, "they follow some guru called 'Yahshua.'"

"Yahshua," I thought to myself, "who is that?" I was disappointed, to say the least. These people seemed so nice, but if they didn't follow the Son of God then I didn't want to have anything to do with them. If there was one thing I didn't need to get involved with, it was some strange religion. So I decided to steer clear of them.

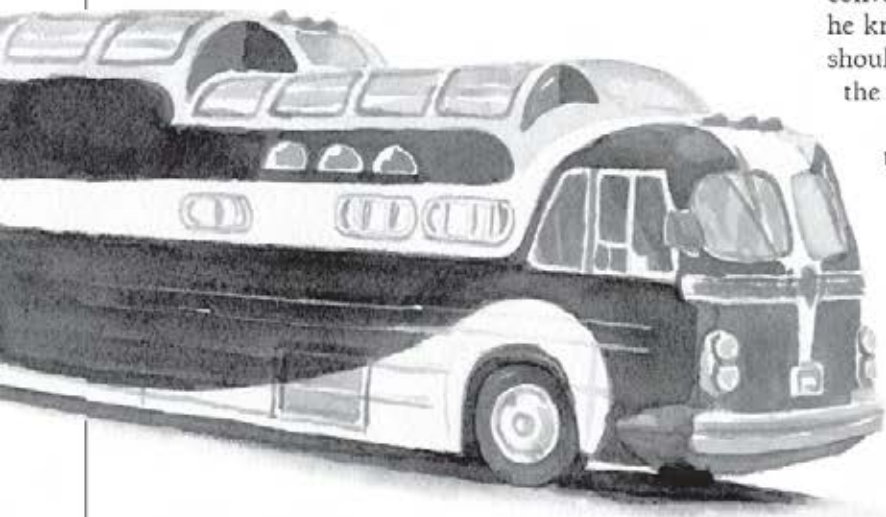
Eventually, there I was in college, still very lonely and still searching. Some friends had invited me to several concerts that would be happening that summer. I decided to go with them. At one of the first shows, I saw that same bus and I was instantly intrigued again. Something about these people seemed so special, but, I had to remind myself, they didn't follow the Son of God. It had been a couple of years since I had first come in contact with them. I had gone my way, searching for something real, but had found nothing.

At one of those shows, I was walking through the parking lot and saw a good friend of mine. Oddly enough, he was sitting very near that bus. He was talking with someone and I sat down to join the conversation. After a few minutes, I asked him if he knew anything about that bus. He told me that I should talk to the other man, because he was part of the community that was traveling on the bus.

I was excited, since I had never actually talked to anyone from the bus; I had just heard things about them. The things I had heard about them following "Yahshua" had kept me away for almost two years. But I was full of questions about the community and what they believed. My first question was, of course, "Do you believe in the Son of God?"

To my surprise, the man said, "Of course we do. Our entire life revolves around Him and His teachings!"

I could hardly believe it!



He went on to explain to me that while most people call the Son of God *Jesus*, they preferred His original Hebrew name – **Yahshua**. He told me that it actually meant “**God’s Salvation**.”

The more he talked the more everything began to make sense to me. I had grown up in a society that had caused me to question everything, but somehow I never questioned what had been handed down to me at church. I thought that because these people didn’t say *Jesus*, although they were full of love and kindness, they must be bad. But what I found out was that *Jesus* wasn’t even the Savior’s name!

So now, as you have guessed, I am a part of this people who follow the Son of God, and I would like to share with you the amazing things I have learned about His name.

In the days of John the Baptist and the Son of God, the preserved language of the devout Jews 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,<sup>1</sup> but the Hebrew name **Yahshua** literally means Yahweh’s Salvation,<sup>2</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 these 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 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 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 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 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>

I’d much rather call the Son of God, my Savior, by His true name – the name His own mother, *Miriam*, and foster father, *Yoceph*, and all of His Jewish friends called Him. Not only have I found out what His true name is, but His true Body on earth as well. I am so thankful to have finally found true rest with the true Savior. 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. Our addresses are on the back of this paper. 🌸

*Michael*



<sup>1</sup> Some authorities say that *Iesous* is derived from an earlier form meaning “healing Zeus,” the supreme god of ancient Greek mythology.

<sup>2</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 (“whose name is *Yah*”), and as most familiar in the word *Halleluyah* (“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>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





*Of course, God does not need human beings in order to exist. He existed long before there were any. Yet He was not satisfied. There was something missing for Him. He is spirit, but He wants to be expressed in the material realm. He wants friends.*

*In the beginning of the Bible, after God made man, it says that then He rested. That rest suggests a satisfaction. Satisfaction comes from getting what you desire, often what you have longed and waited a long time for. The Creator longed for a compatible creature.*

When Adam was made, God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a helper suitable for him."<sup>1</sup> Every creature that He made He brought before Adam, but none was found that was suitable or compatible. None could satisfy what God had seen was lacking in Adam. He was put into a deep sleep and a rib taken out of his side. From it woman was formed. Can you imagine the joy in Adam when he awoke and saw her? As beautiful and wonderful as the garden must have been, can you imagine the empty place that she filled? No more loneliness!

God understood Adam's need. He had made Adam in His image. The need that Adam had is representative of something going on in the Creator. The Bible tells of God's tremendous desire to be connected to His

highest creation – *mankind*. Since the beginning He has been committed to being a friend to them, even a Father. Unfortunately, mankind has rarely shown the same commitment to Him.

Friends love at all times.<sup>2</sup> They are allied in the same cause. But from very near the start of history, men and women have allied themselves with God's enemy. How much it must have hurt the Creator for His pure love to be rejected!

Maybe some don't think God can be hurt, but we can be hurt, and He made us in His image. Maybe the purer someone's love is, the *more* it hurts when the one he loves chooses

to love another. Oh, the joy and satisfaction when He created man, male and female! Oh, the pain when they

*Maybe some don't think God can be hurt, but we can be hurt, and He made us in His image. Maybe the purer someone's love is, the more it hurts when the one he loves chooses to love another.*

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 2:16 <sup>2</sup> Proverb 17:17

chose to turn away from Him! No more satisfaction!

### The Remedy

*But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied. (Isaiah 53: 10-11, NASB)*

God's heart is so wonderful towards mankind that He even chose to send His own Son to be put to death as the sacrifice for our sins. That sacrifice would bring about what He always wanted. His act of unfathomable love would capture our hearts so that we would once again ally ourselves with Him. The payment for our sins would open up a channel between us and Him, allowing His love to be poured out in our hearts.<sup>3</sup> Love in a person's heart causes love to take action in his life. His love can give us the power to triumph over sin.

Just as the first Eve was taken out of the first Adam's side, so the second Eve came out of the side of the second Adam.<sup>4</sup> God took a rib out of Adam's side to form Eve. The

bone that protected his heart was formed into the creature who would protect what was in his heart. The blood and water that flowed out of Yahshua's side is what can cleanse a man and make him a new creation. Out of His side came a new creature created in Him for the purpose of protecting and expressing what is in His heart.

He needs us! He needs and desires a bride, and He can't return until she has made herself ready,<sup>5</sup> having put all of His enemies under His feet.<sup>6</sup>

Every spirit that has ever stood in the way of men and women being God's true friends must be overcome by man. It is what God needs man to do *right now*. Then His good pleasure will prosper, which means that what pleases Him will actually be done.

God is love. Love loves to love. It loves to be in love. It loves the interaction of love. Love cannot isolate itself, or it ceases to be love. Love finds satisfaction in loving. Love needs somebody to love. If His love is poured out in our hearts then we love as He loved. That love binds those that have the same love together; they become one like the Father and the Son.<sup>7</sup> It is the

forming factor for His Body. It is the Body in whom His Spirit resides – the communities of disciples that make up His Holy Nation.<sup>8</sup> Love brought to birth the communities of Acts 2 and 4,<sup>9</sup> where His love could be expressed.

The fullness of what is in God's heart needs to be put in His people's hearts, so they can fully express His heart.

*Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus [Yahshua] said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father..." (John 14:8-9)*

*Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. (1 John 4:17)*

The evidence of His love has to be plainly seen so that people can know His love. People can't know His love apart from that evidence. It takes a community of disciples who love one another just as He loved them.<sup>10</sup>

God needs friends to help Him bring about everything that is in His heart. He wants to make us His friends! ❧

*All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into His friends and gave us the task of making others His friends also. Our message is that God was making all mankind His friends through Christ. God did not keep an account of their sins, and He has given us the message which tells how He makes them His friends. Here we are, then, speaking for Christ, as though God Himself were making His appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf: let God change you from enemies into His friends.  
2 Corinthians 5:18-20, TEV*

<sup>3</sup> Romans 5:5 <sup>4</sup> John 19:34 <sup>5</sup> Revelation 19:7 <sup>6</sup> Hebrews 10:12-13; Romans 16:20 <sup>7</sup> John 17:20-23 <sup>8</sup> 1 Peter 2:9 <sup>9</sup> Acts 2:44 <sup>10</sup> John 13:34-35

# The Whole Message of This New Life

The city of Jerusalem was in an uproar, and the courts of the temple grounds were utterly shaken. During Pentecost, the apostles of Yahshua\* the Messiah had proclaimed salvation and resurrection from the dead in the name of the man Yahshua who had been hated by the Jewish leaders and murdered to quell any uprising from the people.

Now thousands were believing and being baptized into the Community of Messiah. Jerusalem had never seen such a marvel. Household after household was being established throughout the region. Men, women, and whole families were moving into the area from countries all around the Mediterranean world, selling their homes, their farms, and possessions, and giving all to meet the needs of the new community.

What an upheaval this was to those of the Jewish high priestly order! Even some from among the priesthood had believed. They had joined this sect and were participating wholeheartedly, with unabashed love for one another, in demonstration of a life together. Their common life was the talk of the town.<sup>1</sup>

Then, sometime after the day of Pentecost, there was more explosive growth. Another two thousand joined the community. The apostles had again preached salvation in the name of Yahshua the Messiah, right in the Court of the Gentiles. The whole city was aware of what was taking place, but they didn't fully understand what caused these people to start living together. They could see the contrast between the cynical, yet powerful, religious leaders of Jerusalem, and the simple devotion and love of the new followers of Messiah. The Pharisees and religious leaders knew something had to be done quickly. This was worse than when Yahshua Himself was alive!

Several thousand within the region of Judea now claimed faith in this Messiah, and as a result they daily served and cared for one another, laying down their lives for one another.<sup>2</sup> Their love for one another flowed out of the forgiveness they had received for their own sins. They had no higher preoccupation than this: to daily give themselves to meeting the needs of the brotherhood. They worked with unlimited vision and zeal.

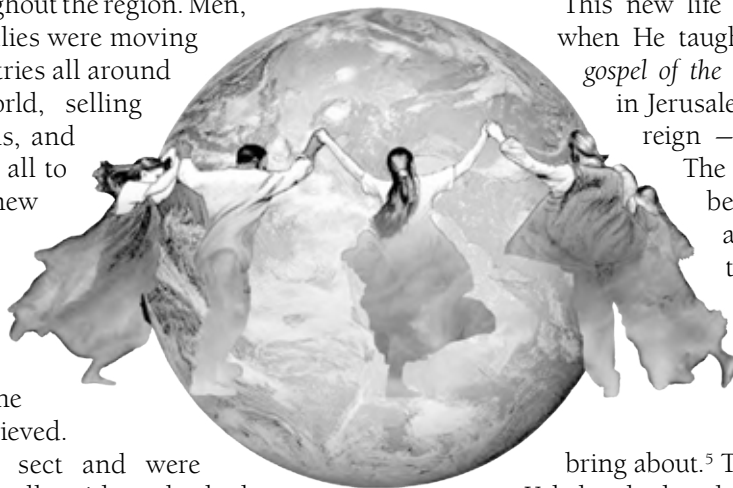
## The Gospel of the Kingdom

This new life was what Yahshua meant when He taught His disciples about the *gospel of the Kingdom*.<sup>3</sup> The community in Jerusalem was a foretaste of God's reign – His Kingdom on earth.<sup>4</sup>

The greatest witness, far beyond the miraculous cures at the apostles' hands, was the miracle of this new life together. Their oneness of heart and unselfish love and care for one another were the works only God could

bring about.<sup>5</sup> These were the *greater works* Yahshua had spoken of in John 14:12. It would be the outstanding witness<sup>6</sup> of His life on earth.<sup>7</sup>

Social, educational, and language barriers fell before this love, losing their power to divide mankind. All those who believed were together and shared all they had together.<sup>8</sup> Going from house to house they fed and clothed one another. They worked together, serving each other in deep gratitude and thankfulness for this new life. They shared a mutually supportive economic structure that expressed the reality that they were seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.<sup>9</sup> And just as the Savior had promised, all their needs were abundantly supplied through their *common life* without having to strive for them as the Gentiles did. In obedience to the gospel, they had left all behind them and had received a hundred times



\* For more on the name Yahshua, see *What's in a Name* on page 7 <sup>1</sup> Acts 2:41-47 and Acts 4:32-37 <sup>2</sup> John 13:34-35; 15:12-14 <sup>3</sup> Matthew 24:14; Luke 4:43; Matthew 4:23; 9:35; Mark 10:29-30 <sup>4</sup> Matthew 12:25-29 <sup>5</sup> Acts 4:32 <sup>6</sup> Witness – evidence; the testimony of one who presents indisputable facts. <sup>7</sup> John 13:34-35; 17:21-23 <sup>8</sup> Acts 2:44 <sup>9</sup> Matthew 6:33

more in exchange for what they had given up. This proved the genuineness of their faith, showing that they were also forgiven and washed clean of all their sins.<sup>10</sup> They no longer lived for themselves or sought their own occupations, but were employed with the daily preoccupation of building the Community of Messiah,<sup>11</sup> a brand new life and culture.

### The Many Other Words

The apostles faithfully preached the “many other words”<sup>12</sup> of the gospel, teaching those who heard to obey all that Messiah had commanded.<sup>13</sup> They were repeatedly warned and taken into custody to quench their zeal, but nothing could hinder the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that was upon them. It wasn’t long before the tension escalated and the religious leaders in Jerusalem decided that enough was enough! They conspired together to destroy the disciples and bring an end to the confusion they were causing among their Jewish brothers. They would be thrown into prison and then it would be decided what should be done with these men who were promoting this new religious sect among the Jews. They marched in carefully, so as not to cause a riot, and took Peter and John into custody.

### The Whole Message of this New Life

In the midst of their suffering, in the stillness of the night, from within the darkness of the prison walls, an angel appeared and the doors opened.

“Go, stand in the Temple Courts,” he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life.” (Acts 5:20)

There was no stopping them now. The whole message of this new life, which was being lived out in community right in front of the eyes

of the people of Jerusalem, could not be hidden. The angel commanded that the whole message of this new life had to be explicitly<sup>14</sup> understood by those who were seeing it. The consequential effect of their witness and behavior must not be lost on the people of Jerusalem.

The authority of that angel came upon them and the apostles knew what to do.<sup>15</sup> They took a fearless stand and began boldly teaching about this new life of community right there in the temple courts. The people of Jerusalem needed someone to explain the significance of this new life and where it came from so that they too could be saved. Otherwise, the people of Jerusalem would not have understood it.

The message could now be fully proclaimed because that life was already in existence. The angel could not have given Peter this command before the community in Jerusalem was established. The witness of the Kingdom<sup>16</sup> was an observable life together in community and was an integral<sup>17</sup> part of the good news. That’s what the angel was telling them. So, the gospel needed to be articulated in clearly defined terms that explained the reality of the life it produced. Of course, the life the angel was speaking of in Acts 5:20 was none other than the life the Holy Spirit had caused to be described in the previous chapters. You can read about it yourself in Acts 2 and 4!

### What Message Would You Proclaim?

But let’s put the shoe on the other foot: What if the angel were to come to you? What would you confidently go out to proclaim? How would you explain your “life in Christ” to the people of the modern world? Would it

be in words very similar to Peter’s that day, full of his testimony of the vibrant life of the Community of Jerusalem? Or could you only tell them about your Sunday School class and Sunday worship service and your Bible study on Wednesday night? Or how you try to be a good witness at your job, and are faithful to pay your tithes? But do you really suppose that the Holy Spirit would have described in such detail the vibrant community life of the church in Jerusalem if it were not an example to be imitated?<sup>18</sup>

Peter had a confidence that all believers are to have. No, all believers are not apostles as he was, but all should have the confidence of knowing that the gospel they preach is lived out as a witness, observable by all, just like the church in Jerusalem – the Community of the Redeemed. That was the witness of those who believed. They lived together, sharing all things in common, being devoted to the teachings of the apostles and their fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer at their daily gatherings.

Their life was “set apart” and distinct from the common Roman or Judaic lifestyle, a life that stood in stark contrast to the principles that governed modern society. It was the result of obeying all that Yahshua commanded.<sup>19</sup> Their acceptance of His sacrifice on their behalf and their obedience to His commands for discipleship<sup>20</sup> was the basis for the Holy Spirit to be imparted to them.<sup>21</sup>

Wherever the veritable<sup>22</sup> gospel was preached, this *pattern* of the life of Messiah in community would be the result.<sup>23</sup> The *words* of the gospel, together with the *life* of community (which is the fruit of that gospel), is the witness of the Body of Messiah on earth. You can’t have the one without the other. ❧

<sup>10</sup> Mark 10:28-30 <sup>11</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:15; Ephesians 4:16 <sup>12</sup> Acts 2:40 <sup>13</sup> Matthew 28:18-20 <sup>14</sup> *Explicate* – to make clear the meaning of; explain, understandable, to make sure, plain (from a Latin root meaning “to unfold”) <sup>15</sup> Hebrews 1:14 <sup>16</sup> Matthew 24:14; Luke 4:43; Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 6:33 <sup>17</sup> *Integral* – necessary for completeness; essential; central part to complete. <sup>18</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:14; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15 <sup>19</sup> Matthew 28:18-20; John 14:21,23; 8:51; 15:7-14; 1 John 2:3-5; Revelation 22:14 <sup>20</sup> Luke 14:26-33; Matthew 10:34-40; Mark 8:34-38; 10:26-30; John 12:25-26 <sup>21</sup> Acts 5:32; John 14:21,23 <sup>22</sup> *Veritable* – agreeable to truth or to fact; actual; real; true; genuine, authentic. <sup>23</sup> Acts 2:41-47; 4:32-35; 1 Thessalonians 2:14



# 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 out of death and 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 1 John, chapters one through five. Then especially consider verses 3:14, 16, and 17. They utterly disqualify mere mental belief (Gnosticism).

*<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 criteria 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 “they love the brethren.” The presence or absence of true salvation will be revealed by the results of the litmus test.

“I love, I love my brothers and sisters in the Lord” most would say, and was my first response, I must admit. Most people would say they love, 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 ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*” How did the Son of God demonstrate love? By laying down his life everyday 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 is not sharing it, it is proof-negative for the love of God being present in His heart. Selfishness, greed, accumulations of extra possessions, 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 like 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 they have passed out of death into life after reading 1 John, 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 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 twice in verse 13: “believe on the name of the Son of God.” 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 eternal life. In fact, they were now sure 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 was 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 who wants to know whether this has actually happened in a person’s life, or whether they only have 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 why and how we fail to love in a greater and more comprehensive way than we do. And, He does not overlook it. He is not partial.

### Those Who Have the Son Have the Life

Those who had the Son had 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 life was just like that of everyone in the world around me. The only difference was that I did a few things in the evening and on the weekend that 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

\* See *What’s in a Name* on page 7. <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.”

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.

## 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." (John 7:17) 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>7</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 Him (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)*

*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.*

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 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>8</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. <sup>42</sup>And they continued steadfastly 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>9</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

<sup>6</sup> Romans 10:14-17 <sup>7</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>8</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>9</sup> Romans 8:1-4


## The Litmus Test

his teachings, and not meet the needs of their brothers. Such "believers" effectively discarded 1 John as an "epistle of straw."

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." "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>10</sup>

Faced with this, Luther, a man famous for his foul tongue and fiery invective, had to make a choice.<sup>11</sup> Was he wrong? Had he himself failed the litmus test which James had given 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 to disregard 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 did with the Letter of James, the evidence of the litmus test 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>10</sup> James 2:14-17 and 1:26, respectively. <sup>11</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





# NIGHTFALL

*We must work the works of Him who sent Me, as long as it is day; night is coming, when no man can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world. (John 9:4-5)*

The Son of God spoke these words to His disciples, prophesying of a time that was still in the future. After the light of the world was no longer in the world, a time called “night” would come when no one would be able to do the work of God. What was He talking about? What was the light of the world?

According to the Master’s own words, He was the light of the world. But He also said in Matthew 5:14 that His disciples were the light of the world. So, according to His prophecy, “night” would come when neither He nor His disciples were in the world. At that time, no one would be able to do the work of God. But when would this happen? Has there ever been a time when Jesus was not on the earth and also had no disciples on the earth? Will there be in the future?

When our Master finished His mission on earth and ascended to His Father, the work of God was left in the hands of His disciples. They were His Body on earth, the dwelling place of His Spirit, carrying out the deeds prepared for them.<sup>1</sup> Their primary task was to serve each other and build each other up until they all became like their Teacher in every way.<sup>2</sup> They were a witness of the coming

Kingdom. Their life together showed what it will be like when Messiah returns and the whole earth obeys His commands.<sup>3</sup>

*So, if the Church did the works of God in the beginning, and will be doing them at the end, what did the Master mean by “night, when no man can work”? Could there have been a time in-between when the light went out?*

Once every nation has seen this demonstration, the end will come. At that time, according to Revelation 19:7-8, the Church, the Bride of Messiah, will be ready for Him. She will be clothed in righteous deeds, the works that He prepared for her.

So, if the Church did the works of God in the beginning, and will be doing them at the end, what did the Master mean by “night, when no man can work”? Could there have been a time in-between when the light went out? Surely this prophecy must have a fulfillment. The Son of God Himself spoke it. Did the works of God ever stop being done? Could this be what Revelation 2:4-5 was talking about?

*I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.*

What was going on at the end of the first century when this was written? If the churches had “abandoned love,” and God is love, did this mean that they had abandoned God? If they weren’t

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 2:10 <sup>2</sup> Ephesians 4:11-16; Luke 6:40 <sup>3</sup> Matthew 24:14; Daniel 7:27 (RSV, NRSV, ESV, NJB)

doing the works of love they did at first, does that mean they weren't doing the works of God? If God "removes your lampstand," does that mean you are no longer the light of the world, as far as He is concerned? Is it possible that the people this was written to disregarded it?<sup>4</sup> Did they not have ears to hear this warning that the Spirit spoke to the churches?

What if the light of all the churches actually went out at some point in history, between the bright beginning recorded in Acts and the glorious end prophesied in Revelation? Could such a thing be possible? In John 8:31, Jesus said, "You are truly My disciples if you keep obeying My teachings." Did He mean that if the churches stopped obeying His teachings, then they wouldn't be His true disciples anymore? It was His true disciples who were the light of the world. If there were no more true disciples, would the light of the world cease? What does it take to be His disciple?

We know that He said, "None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions."<sup>5</sup> We also know that the twelve apostles left everything to follow Him<sup>6</sup> and that they taught others to do the same.<sup>7</sup> The first church in Jerusalem lived this way in obedience to His commands:

*All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For all who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. (Acts 4:32-35)*

This sharing did not come from mere external obedience, out of a sense of obligation. Obviously, they had a deep concern about each other's pressing needs. It was greater than their consideration for their own future security. This was the result of God's love being poured out in their hearts by the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup> These deeds of care were the "works of God" that had been prepared for the "light of the world" to do in the sight of the watching world.<sup>9</sup>

So if the light of the world ceased, as the Master predicted, how would we know? Would there be no more true disciples on the earth? How could we

*What if the light of all the churches actually went out at some point in history, between the bright beginning recorded in Acts and the glorious end prophesied in Revelation? Could such a thing be possible?*



<sup>4</sup> It seems that the church in Ephesus had not taken to heart Paul's encouragement in Ephesians 6:24 many years earlier.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 14:33 <sup>6</sup> Matthew 19:27; Mark 10:28 <sup>7</sup> Matthew 28:19-20

<sup>8</sup> Romans 5:5 <sup>9</sup> Ephesians 2:10; 1 Peter 2:12

tell? Would it be that they didn't obey His commands? Would they no longer give up their own possessions? Would they stop sharing everything they had and start becoming rich? Would they start to have poor and needy people in the churches? How disobedient would they have to get before God no longer considered them to be the light of the world?

If the churches stopped being the light of the world, what would they be like?<sup>10</sup> If they no longer had God's love in them, would they start loving the things of the world?<sup>11</sup> Would they get involved in the world's politics?<sup>12</sup> Would they fight in the world's wars?<sup>13</sup> Would they persecute people who disagreed with them? Would they claim to have God's light in them, when really it was darkness?<sup>14</sup>

If all the lampstands of the first century churches went out, as Revelation 2:4-5 warned,<sup>15</sup> it would explain a lot of things in history. It would explain Christianity becoming the state religion under Constantine. It would explain the atrocities of the Crusades, the horrible tortures of the Inquisition, the flagrant corruption of the popes, the religious wars of the Reformation, and the splintering of Christianity<sup>16</sup> into over 36,000 current denominations. It would explain why the Christian Church, supposed to be the dwelling place of God in the Spirit,<sup>17</sup> has for nearly 2000 years



*How far would the  
Church have to fall before  
God no longer considered  
them to be the  
light of the world?*

disciples had been restored to the earth again?<sup>19</sup> And if the light of the world were once again on the earth, what would it look like? Would they do the works

that the disciples did at first, like Revelation 3:4-5 talks about? Would they obey the Master's teachings to love each other,<sup>20</sup> like the first Church in Acts 4:32-35? Would they leave everything to follow Him?

And if the light were once again on the earth, how would people respond to it?

How would you respond?

*While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may*

*become sons of light... I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.*

*(John 12:36,46-48)* ❧



<sup>10</sup> Philippians 2:14 <sup>11</sup> 1 John 2:15; 1 Corinthians 16:22 <sup>12</sup> 2 Timothy 2:3-4 <sup>13</sup> John 18:36; Matthew 26:52; Luke 22:50-51 <sup>14</sup> Matthew 6:22-24; Luke 11:35. Make sure that the light you think you have is not really darkness. <sup>15</sup> See also Romans 11:21-22. <sup>16</sup> Possibly the most divided of all religions, in utter disregard of 1 Corinthians 1:10-13. <sup>17</sup> Ephesians 2:22 <sup>18</sup> Establish new churches full of disciples who obeyed their Master's commands. <sup>19</sup> John 1:4; 8:12; 1 John 5:12-13 <sup>20</sup> John 13:34-35; 15:12-15

# THE COWARD &

Life is easy when everything is going your way. When you are not in the heat of the testing, it is easy to have faith and confidence that you can stand in the face of whatever might come your way. Words are cheap, so they say. It's even easy to believe in "The Cause" from the seat of comfort and security. But what if the call did come to test you to the very core of your heart, to overcome what you have never faced before? What if the most crucial challenge was set before you, one that demanded nothing less than your very life? What if it was the most consequential mission ever conceived? How would you respond?

First comes the call, the challenge. Then a qualifying criterion must be set forth, something that clearly spells out all the demands and requirements. The course has to be laid out, showing the starting qualifications, the objective to be achieved, and what it will take to endure until the very end. As the details are manifested, the candidate can begin to evaluate the cost. He can weigh all the options, the factors, and each and every possibility. He can determine whether the end result is worth the cost, to see whether he is really willing to face the challenge.

Every challenge is accompanied by a reward. According to the clarity that one has, he can judge whether the reward is worth the cost. And according to that understanding, if he is honest, he can foresee whether he will be proven a Coward or a Conqueror.

Will you face the challenge?

What if it was the Son of God who set the challenge?



What if the goal is making His Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven?

What if the call is to love, just as He loved?

What if the cost is everything... yes, even your own life?

The one who only sees the goal becomes the Conqueror.

*The one who conquers will inherit all things,  
and I will be his God and he will be my son.  
Revelation 21:7*

The one who only sees the obstacles is the Coward.

*But for the cowardly and unbelieving...  
their part will be in the lake that burns  
with fire and brimstone,  
which is the second death.  
(Revelation 21:8)*

# THE CONQUEROR



First you must hear the call, the challenge...

*“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.”*  
(Mark 10:21)

*“...whoever of you  
does not forsake all that he has  
cannot be My disciple.”*  
(Luke 14:33)

*“Be saved from this perverse generation.”*  
(Acts 2:40)

The one who heard the call (by grace),  
understood the call (through faith), and  
walked away,<sup>1</sup> proved to be the Coward.

*“But he was sad at this word, and went away  
sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”*  
(Mark 10:22)

*“Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said,  
“It was necessary that the word of God should be  
spoken to you first;  
but since you reject it, and judge yourselves  
unworthy of everlasting life,  
behold, we turn to the Gentiles.”*

(Acts 13:46)

*He who loves father or mother more than Me  
is not worthy of Me.*

*And he who loves son or daughter more than Me  
is not worthy of Me.*

*And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me  
is not worthy of Me.*

(Matthew 10:37-38)

The one who heard the call (by grace),  
understood the call (through faith), and paid  
the price, became the Conqueror.

*Then Peter began to say to Him,*

*“See, we have left all and followed You.”*

*So Jesus answered and said, “Assuredly, I say to you,  
there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters  
or father or mother or wife or children or lands,  
for My sake and the gospel’s sake,  
who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time –  
houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and  
children and lands, with persecutions –  
and in the age to come, eternal life.*

(Mark 10:28-30)

For “by grace, through faith” one is saved  
*if* he is actually *saved* through the faith that  
came by grace. To pay the price that He said  
to pay is not “works.” It is what the faith that  
came by grace would persuade you to do, lest  
anyone should boast.

*“Through many tribulations we must  
enter the kingdom of God.”*

(Acts 14:22)

So what makes the difference between the  
Coward and the Conqueror?

*“If anyone is willing to do His will,  
he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God  
or whether I speak from Myself.”*

(John 7:17)

<sup>1</sup> John 3:18,36; 12:48

# 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 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

*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.*

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)*

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

<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 <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

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

The Master 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 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

*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.*

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>



<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 <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.

## 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 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*

*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.*

*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>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





# You Know the Commandments

*“You know the commandments,” He said. “Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and your mother...”<sup>1</sup>*

*“Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth,” responded the rich young ruler. He was probably quite respected among those who knew him, for he had done such good things.*

*“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.”*

“You know the commandments...” Could it be that this man knew the Law’s requirement that there would be no poor in the land?<sup>2</sup> Surely he had learned about things like that growing up. What went on in his heart and mind when he walked past the poor on the street? Something in him seemed to want to be right with his God. That’s why he had kept all those commandments. But how did he reconcile the fact that he was so rich while many of his countrymen were so poor, especially in the face of what had been spoken to his people about this very issue? Did he really love his neighbor as himself?<sup>3</sup>

There are those who are looking to be justified by God and those who are looking to justify Him.<sup>4</sup>

The rich young ruler proved to be someone who just wanted to be justified. For surely if such a man

had given up his riches to the poor, God would have been justified, and as the Master said, so would he, as evidenced by the eternal life he would have received for trusting and obeying.

The same fear that had come upon him every time he walked past the poor came upon him when the Master spoke those *hard* words. Though he surely did want to inherit eternal life, the demand was too great. To give up what had always been the source of his security and comfort was too much. He could not, or did not overcome that fear.

*And so at these words his face fell, and he went away grieved, for he was one who owned much property. (Mark 10:22, NASB)*

He was grieved as when a loved one dies. A hope that maybe he could be right with the One who made

<sup>1</sup> The story of the “rich young ruler” is in Mark 10:17-30, Matthew 19:16-30, and Luke 18:18-30

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 15:4,8 <sup>3</sup> Matthew 19:19, Leviticus 19:18 <sup>4</sup> Luke 7:29,35

him, that he could have confidence of eternal life, died at the words he heard. Every time he walked past the poor and tightened his grip on his money bag, he knew there was something wrong. Now it was clear.

*The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which a man found and hid, and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. (Matthew 13:44, NASB)*

One walks away grieved because he is told to sell all that he has and give to the poor, but another gladly gives up all he has for the joy of finding the Kingdom.

*I will give of the fountain of 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. (Revelation 21:6-7, NRSV)*

It seemed as though the rich young ruler was thirsty, at least enough to come and ask about inheriting eternal life. Why didn't he receive the water of life, especially if it is given freely? "He who overcomes..." There must have been something he did not overcome.

Maybe he was not *that* thirsty. Fear prevented him from responding to the requirement for him to have eternal life. Of course there was an

obstacle, but then the Master knew there would be obstacles to following Him and gaining eternal life. That is why He said things like, "He who overcomes" and "pick up your cross."

The one in Matthew 13:44 who sold all that he had to buy the field obviously got to drink the water of life. Certainly the same fear that came to the rich young ruler could

*Nothing secures your life  
in this world more than riches,  
Certainly you would have  
to hate your life in this world  
to give up your riches. One who  
loves his life in this world  
has to put his trust in riches.*

have come to him, but he proved to not be a coward. The treasure had more value to him than even his own life in this world.

*He who loves his life loses it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal. (John 12:25)*

Nothing secures your life in this world more than riches. Certainly you would have to hate your life in this world to give up your riches. One who loves his life in this world

has to put his trust in riches.

*Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God. (Mark 10:24, NKJV)*

Revelation 21:8 describes the fate of those who fail to overcome whatever stands in the way of drinking the water of life. They are the "cowardly and unbelieving." Of all the things listed that cause a person to be worthy of the second death, or lake of fire, the first is the worst. The greatest crime of mankind, the worst possible crime you can commit is to reject Messiah. It is the rejection of God's love.

This is not talking about those who have never been offered the water of life, but those who are offered the opportunity and refuse, just as the rich young ruler did. They refuse to put their trust in Messiah because of the fear of losing "their life in this world."

All his life the rich young ruler had lived in the fear of losing what made his life on earth so comfortable. God's grace had come to set him free from that fear, to save him from his sin. He could have been set free from his fears by putting his trust in Him. He could have picked up his cross and followed Him. The cross would have crucified his self-life that was so dependent on those earthly riches. But he didn't embrace it. He was a coward. When push came to shove, he gave in to fear. He could not put anything above his own security.

That is the aspect of being a coward that is so dangerous. When a coward's life is in danger, he will do anything to protect it. How many atrocities in history have been performed according to that principle? So the cowardly and unbelieving in Revelation 21:8 are those who refuse to believe because it threatens their self-life.

### *The Love of Money*

*Some longing for wealth have wandered away from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. The love of money is the root of all evil. (1 Timothy 6:9-10)*

As a poisonous plant whose toxic roots contain the potency to kill, so the *love of money* is the root of all evil, eventually killing the one who drinks of its pleasures. *Love* means *the direction of your will, what you delight in and direct your energy toward*. The love of money begins as a normal inclination toward comfort and pleasure, but like all plants, it grows as you water it. It becomes the dominating factor that directs your life, becoming an insatiable appetite for wealth that consumes your time, energy, and thought life. As your wealth increases, you become ever more attentive to and worried about your assets and expenditures. Before long the plant begins to blossom into a voracious desire to accumulate wealth, ultimately bearing its deadly fruit.

## Woe

*But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. (Luke 6:24, NASB)*

“Woe” is a solemn warning of impending doom. The woe to them is because when life in this world comes to an end, so will their comfort, just as Abraham told the rich man,

*Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. (Luke 16:25, NASB)*

The grief that the rich young ruler walked away with was just a foretaste of an eternity of torment. Woe to him! Oh, so sad! He could have done what the disciples did. Perhaps until that point he had been powerless to overcome the grip his riches had on his soul, but as the Master told His disciples that day, “With God all things are possible.”<sup>5</sup>

## Fulfilling the Law

*Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.*

*(Matthew 5:17, NASB)*

Since its beginning, Israel, the people of God, had known that they should have no poor among them.<sup>6</sup> It was part of the Law. Why were there so many poor in the time of the rich young ruler? Though the Law outlined the goodness of God’s heart, it did not have the power to free man from his sin – the thing that had always stopped them from really expressing His heart.

That is the very reason that God sent His Son,

*And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name **Yahshua**,<sup>7</sup> for it is He who will save His people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21, NASB)*

What could not be done through the Law, as good as it was, had to wait for the Savior. The Savior certainly did not come to nullify the Law, but rather, by setting man free from his selfish nature (which caused him to sin), give him the ability to fulfill it. He did not come to fulfill it all by Himself. He was not going to eliminate poverty on

*No one can keep the comfort of his possessions and have the God of all comfort be his God at the same time. What He had required of the rich young ruler was part of the formulation of the Gospel that would communicate the same requirements for everyone.*

His own. But by setting men free from their self-centered existence so that they could “give to the poor,” the Law would be fulfilled. That is the “all things” that are possible with God.

If only he had put his trust in the “good teacher” like those disciples who said, “See we have left all to follow You.” For to them the Master responded,

*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 shall 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 10:29-30)*

Not only would the rich young ruler have received eternal life, but also a hundred times what he had given up, in this age. What he gave up for Messiah’s sake would be put into the pot with what others who had the same response gave up, in order to create a “common pot,” or as Paul said, a “commonwealth.”

*Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Ephesians 2:12)*

## Wealth: Its Enticements and Promises

The deception of wealth promises independence, success, comfort, security, happiness, and freedom, etc. But in reality it produces self-imprisonment, dysfunction and divorce, compounded sorrows, fretfulness and insecurity, concealments, treachery, and slavery to excess and indulgence.<sup>1</sup> Selfish ambition and the lust for personal gain will destroy the one it entices.<sup>2</sup> The desire for riches in this life causes men to fall into a *pattern of constant temptation*.<sup>3</sup> It is a snare in which many foolhardy and harmful lusts overtake and plunge men into destruction. Once the poison is taken into the soul, once the taste for it is acquired, it brings certain ruin.

A man’s personality and characteristic tendencies are molded by what he loves. Unless the love of money is uprooted,<sup>4</sup> it will eventually overtake his soul. His intellect, will, and emotions will conform to its lusts and desires. An inescapable ruin falls upon him, which he must carry for eternity.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter 2:19 <sup>2</sup> James 3:14-16 <sup>3</sup> 1 Timothy 6:9 <sup>4</sup> Matthew 15:13

<sup>5</sup> Mark 10:27 <sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy 15:4,8 <sup>7</sup> Literally it was “Yahshua,” which means “Yahweh’s Salvation.” See *What’s in a Name* on page 7.

It is what those who had given up all for His sake established after His death and resurrection:

*And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. (Acts 2:44-45)*


*And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace*

*was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need. (Acts 4:32-35)*

Finally, through the saving power of Messiah they were able to fulfill the wonderful Law. They were producing the fruit of the Kingdom of God.<sup>8</sup>

Too bad the rich young ruler did not have the heart to conquer his fears and put his trust in Messiah. Too bad he put his trust in riches. Too bad he was a coward. If only he had overcome!

*So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. (Luke 14:33)*

No one can keep the comfort of his possessions and have the God of all comfort be his God at the same time.<sup>9</sup> What He had required of the rich young ruler was part of the formulation of the Gospel that would communicate the same requirements for everyone. For the Gospel is the power of God to transfer them out of the domain of darkness and into His kingdom.<sup>10</sup> How can anyone really put their trust in Him if they have not taken it off their possessions? 

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 21:43 <sup>9</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.* <sup>10</sup> Romans 1:16; and Colossians 1:13

### Wealth: A Web of Deceit

The love of money becomes a lust for wealth and is the doorway to immorality, covetousness, greed, envy, murder, hatred, idolatry, adultery, uncontrolled anger, drunkenness, revelries and the like.<sup>1</sup> One's soul and character become fashioned by its enticements, and like a spider it weaves its web of deceit and falsehood. As one increases his wealth, being shrewd in business practices and opportunities, his expertise in lying increases with it.<sup>2</sup>

*This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and selfish ambition exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. (James 3:15-16)*

Those who lust after riches reject what they know to be true in their consciences for the sake of personal gain, whatever the cost.<sup>3</sup> Most often that cost is in the human lives they destroy in their relentless pursuit for gain.<sup>4</sup> There are certain characteristic traits that follow those who lust after riches:

1. They oppress the poor to make themselves rich.<sup>5</sup>
2. They do not fear God.<sup>6</sup>
3. They trust in the uncertainty of riches.<sup>7</sup>
4. They are proud and haughty over their unjust success.<sup>8</sup>
5. They are enticed with sinful pleasures.<sup>9</sup>
6. They make great boasts.<sup>10</sup>
7. They are distraught with fear and anxiety over riches.<sup>11</sup>
8. They are unwilling to share with the destitute.<sup>12</sup>
9. They covet more riches.<sup>13</sup>
10. They are proud, with an air of self-importance.<sup>14</sup>
11. They refuse to obey God but trust riches.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Romans 13:13 <sup>2</sup> Proverbs 13:11 <sup>3</sup> Romans 1:18-19; 2 Timothy 3:1-5 <sup>4</sup> Ecclesiastes 5:13-15 <sup>5</sup> Nehemiah 5:1-13; James 2:6-7; 5:1-6; Proverbs 18:23; 22:16, 22, 23; Jeremiah 22:13-19 <sup>6</sup> Job 21:7-15; Psalms 39:6, 49:10-13, 16-20; 52:1-7; Proverbs 11:4, 28; 18:11

<sup>7</sup> Job 21:13, 31:24-28; Psalms 52:1-7, 73:12; Proverbs 18:11; 23:4-5; 27:24; 1 Timothy 6:9, 10, 17 <sup>8</sup> Psalm 73:3-9; Proverbs 18:11; 28:11; Ezekiel 28:5; 1 Timothy 6:4-7 <sup>9</sup> Jeremiah 5:7-9; 27-31; Amos 6:3-8; James 5:5; Proverbs 28:22; 1 Timothy 6:9; Habakkuk 3; Isaiah 3:16-24

<sup>10</sup> Psalm 49:6, 16-19; Jeremiah 9:23; Deuteronomy 8:17-18; 1 Timothy 6:4, 5 <sup>11</sup> Ecclesiastes 5:12; Matthew 13:22; Luke 8:14; 21:34

<sup>12</sup> Mark 10:17-27; Luke 18:22-26; 1 John 3:17 <sup>13</sup> Habakkuk 2:9; Luke 12:15-21; 16:13-31; Hebrews 13:5 <sup>14</sup> 1 Timothy 6:17-18; James 1:10; Deuteronomy 8:17 <sup>15</sup> Mark 10:21; Luke 12:15; Matthew 6:19-21; Proverbs 23:4, 5



## Wealth: A Self-Made Prison

What will one sacrifice when he is “in love”? The price is very high when it comes to riches. What would one give in exchange for his soul?<sup>1</sup> Whatever one gives himself to habitually and compulsively is the object of his love. The deception of riches ensnares the one who has a *love* for it. By what a man is ensnared, by this is he overcome.<sup>2</sup> What has trapped him is his own internal decadence and fallen sense of self-importance.

Most who attain to great wealth live in their own man-made confines of loneliness and isolation. Private, gated entrances

to exclusive properties portray the deeper, underlying reality of what possesses the souls of the rich. Like a top-security prison, the guards of self-centeredness and pride work together as a blockade to those outside its walls. The rich alienate and are alienated by their own insatiable lust for wealth. Their castles turn out to be self-made prisons in which they are beset with many sicknesses from constant financial troubles and anxiety.<sup>3</sup>

Those who place their confidence in their riches end up spending enormous amounts of time worrying about the po-

tential of losing what they have. They will seek greater investments to secure their wealth. Oh, security! Riches! It is like the wealthy farmer in Luke 12:16-21 who wanted greater and greater wealth in order to guarantee his future prosperity and comfort. In order to secure what he owned, he tore down one barn to build two. “Well done,” the man said to his soul, “Now I have much wealth stored up for many years to come; I can take my ease and eat, drink, and be merry.” What a fool! That night, his soul was demanded of him, and who would enjoy all that he had hoarded for himself? ❧

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 16:26-27 <sup>2</sup> 2 Peter 2:19-20 <sup>3</sup> Ecclesiastes 5:12-17

# Wasn't it Only for Him?

Haven't you heard people say it? I have. It is one of the many ways preachers, evangelists, and just ordinary people deal with this uncomfortable passage in the New Testament:

*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. (Mark 10:21)*

Didn't He mean that for the rich young ruler *alone*? Wasn't it only for him and not for the rest of us? You know, only for those people who have a "problem" with their riches. Isn't that what the context of Yahshua's words tells us? You can tell that the rich young ruler had a "problem" with riches because he went away sad.

But who has riches and doesn't trust in them? When the Great Depression began and the stock market crashed, people jumped out of windows and killed themselves. When their wealth was gone, they had nothing to fall back upon. They certainly trusted in riches, and when their riches were gone, they had nothing left to trust.

If you read the story carefully you can see that the rich young ruler did *trust* Yahshua\* to a remarkable extent. He might have known Him and His message better than we think. After all, he came to Him because he knew that He had the ability to grant him the one thing he lacked – eternal life. He even knew there was something that he *must do* to gain eternal life. But



the answer to his question, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" was not at all what he thought it would be.

It was a very hard thing to do – if you love your own life in this world – but not if you hate your life in this world.<sup>1</sup>

Give Him a million shekels... climb up the Temple steps a thousand times on his knees... build an orphanage... go to Mount Sinai in the desert and listen to the voice of God... So many things he would have

## *Wealth: The Eternal Consequence*

Yahshua said, "Woe to the rich, for they have their comfort in full." That means in *this* life, not in the next. The word *woe* is one of finality. In the strongest terms it suggests impending doom or judgment. If one spends the majority of his lifetime chasing after wealth and the false sense of security it gives, then when he dies his soul will eternally bear the marks of it – the eternal consequences of yielding to a sordid lust for wealth and riches. His eternal destiny is among the unjust and filthy of humanity. Throughout eternity they remain in that state – *still*.<sup>1</sup>

If only the "rich young ruler"<sup>2</sup> had been willing to see the deep compromise of his own heart when he requested eternal life from the One he called, "Good Teacher." if he had only obeyed, his eternal soul could have been released from the prison of his guilt – riches. In response to the gospel, he would have made himself poor in order to become *truly* rich.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Revelation 22:11 <sup>2</sup> Mark 10:17-30 <sup>3</sup> Mark 10:28-30

<sup>1</sup> John 12:25-26 \* For more on the name Yahshua, see "What's in a Name" on page 7

done for eternal life, even “Only believe!” But to give up *all* he had and come, follow Him... that was too much. The Good Teacher and he had different ideas about “the one thing he lacked.”

The rich young ruler faced the cost of removing the guilt from his conscience, and shuddered, forfeiting eternal life instead of his possessions. Making right the damage his wealth and careless ease had done to others, to the name of God, and to his own soul, involved losing what he would not let go of. He found his security in it.

So, the cost of this “treasure in heaven” was too high – honoring God by *obeying* His words. This meant humbly admitting that the Good Teacher *knew* the way out of the predicament of his guilt. It also meant doing all he could to satisfy His Father’s heart that “there would be no poor in the land.”<sup>2</sup> And it meant making right any wrongs he had committed as a rich man.

There was another wealthy man, a tax collector, who understood this, too. It was the first thing on his conscience when confronted with the mercy of God in the person of Yahshua. Zaccheus gave half his wealth to charity and paid back what he had defrauded from others four times over.<sup>3</sup> Like the rich young ruler, he understood he *had to do something* to be worthy of receiving the Son of God.<sup>4</sup> Sounds heretical, I know, but it all depends on where your heart is: “Where your treasure is there will your heart be also.”<sup>5</sup>

It seems like the rich young ruler wished that could be the other way around: “Where your heart is, there will your treasure be also,” but the Savior didn’t say that. So the man turned away in grief and sorrow, understanding the choice before him. Since then most people have not had his sensitivity of conscience, for they only turn away

with a shrug. “Hard sayings,” they say, and turn away.

Yahshua knew how easy it would be to focus on the particular circumstances of this “rich man” and not see that it applied to *all* who would believe in Him. The “great astonishment” of His disciples showed that even they did not really understand. But they

### *A Commonwealth*

Many will justify their desire for wealth by pointing to the examples of Abraham, King David, or King Solomon. “Were they not wealthy?” But Abraham’s wealth was in his flocks and his large household of servants who were fiercely loyal to him. He obviously loved and cared for them as if they were his own children.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, King David was a man who gathered the disadvantaged to himself, and cared for them as their shepherd and captain.<sup>2</sup> His rulership united Israel and caused all to prosper. It produced the *Commonwealth of Israel*, a type of what would come as a spiritual Israel under the New Covenant.<sup>3</sup>

King Solomon is the exception that proves the rule. Although he started out well and caused the nation to prosper, his love of luxury did the very thing that Paul warned – he fell into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.<sup>4</sup> In the end, the Kingdom his father King David labored to establish, was torn from him.<sup>5</sup>

The true living God would never desire to curse anyone with such “prosperity.”<sup>6</sup> His desire was for another type of prosperity, where the poor in spirit would receive the blessing as they shared what they had for the common good. It was the true prosperity that Peter and the other disciples embraced.

*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 the gospel’s sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in this 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 disciples had embraced poverty for the sake of the gospel, and in return they also received the blessing of true riches.<sup>7</sup> In the Community of Messiah, no one desires riches for themselves, but all is a commonwealth.<sup>8</sup> The material wealth of those who believe is shared among the needy and poor brotherhood. Therefore, all things are held in common, so the wealth is evenly distributed according to need.<sup>9</sup> As a result there are no rich in the Body of Messiah, but there are also no poor. This is true prosperity.

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 15:2-3; 24:1,2,10 <sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel 22:2 <sup>3</sup> Ephesians 2:12 <sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy 6:9

<sup>5</sup> 1 Kings 11:11,12 <sup>6</sup> 1 Timothy 6:5-8 <sup>7</sup> Mark 10:28-30; Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-37

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 2:12 <sup>9</sup> Acts 4:32-35

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 15:4 <sup>3</sup> Luke 19:1-10 <sup>4</sup> Matthew 10:37-38 <sup>5</sup> Matthew 6:21

had been willing to do what the rich young ruler wasn't: "See, we have left all and followed you."<sup>6</sup>

They wanted to know, "What about us? Is there eternal life for us?"

Remember, His disciples were "the poor" and not the rich. What about them? By saying, "There is no one..." Yahshua *generalized* His words to this particular rich young ruler to include all, both rich and poor:

*Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers*


*or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time – houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions – and in the age to come, eternal life. (Mark 10:29-30)*

The underlying issue of possessions is deeper than security. It is authority. Yahshua was not teaching His disciples to preach a gospel of salvation by philanthropy – the good works of the wealthy. He was not training

them that eternal life was for sale with charity or alms. But He was saying something very definitive about salvation: "Are you going to do what I want you to do?"

Knowing what was in the heart of man, the Master thus put His finger on the very nerve of human existence. He was saying to this man what He says to every man and woman: *Unless I can be the highest Authority in your life there is no salvation for you.* This is why He said to the multitudes in Luke 14: 33, "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions."

When the disciples asked in their astonishment, "Who then can be saved?" His answer comforted them, "All things are possible with God."<sup>7</sup> What almost everyone misses is that He goes on to explain *how* it is "possible with God" in verses 29-30 – by forsaking all for His sake and the gospel's sake, resulting in a hundredfold return in the life shared with all who believe, along with persecutions, and in the age to come, eternal life.

Those who fail to see this must embrace the contradiction that God would deny His very own word by granting eternal life to someone who would not obey His word. Isn't that a lot to "hope" for with eternity at stake? 

### The Antidote

*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19-21*

Our wealth has to be invested in something of eternal significance or else we will receive our comfort in full in this life. Eternity is a long time – a long time of paying the price for destroying other people's lives while living a life full of the excessive desires for selfish gain. The Rich Man who closed his eyes and ears to the plight of his poor brother Lazarus learned this too late.

*But Abraham said, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented." Luke 16:25*

The antidote for the toxic poison that accompanies the love of money is what Paul commanded Timothy regarding the rich. Herein is wisdom:

*Command those who are rich in this present world to not be haughty, nor to trust in the uncertainty of their riches, but in the living God, who gives us richly everything we need. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give [distribute their wealth],<sup>1</sup> willing to share [inclined to make others sharers in their possessions],<sup>2</sup> storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold of eternal life. (1 Timothy 6:17-19)*

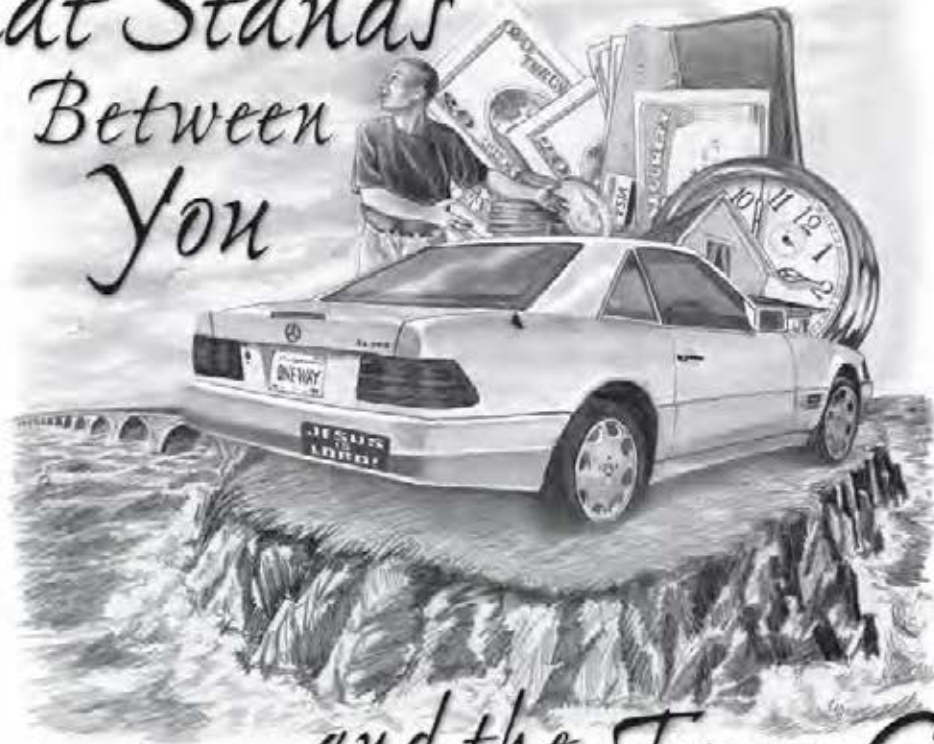
To lay hold of what is truly life eternal, the rich must surrender their riches. They cannot enter the Kingdom of God while holding on to them. We know the grievous example of Ananias and Sapphira who did not fear God, but thought they could lie to the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> They tried to put on a front of distributing all their wealth among their poor brothers in need, but kept some back for their own security.<sup>4</sup> This is in contrast to the examples of the other obedient disciples, including Barnabas, who joyfully laid all he owned at the apostles' feet in deep gratitude for his new life with his new brothers in Messiah.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Greek word is *eumetadotos* (#2130 in Strong's Concordance), meaning: ready to distribute, free to impart (wealth). <sup>2</sup> The Greek word is *koinonikos* (#2843 in Strong's Concordance), meaning: ready and apt to form and maintain communion and fellowship; inclined to make others sharers in one's possessions. <sup>3</sup> Acts 5:1-11 <sup>4</sup> Lk 14:33 <sup>5</sup> Acts 4:34-37

<sup>6</sup> Mark 10:28 <sup>7</sup> Mark 10:26-27



# What Stands Between You



## and the Free Gift

Eternal life is a free gift.<sup>1</sup> Okay, that's clear. But to whom is it given? According to the word of God it is available for all who overcome everything that is set against the freedom to drink of the water of life.

And He said to me, "It is done, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son." (Revelation 21:6,7)

Now some people would think you were a heretic if you said that one had to actually *do* something to gain eternal life. But it's true, there are obstacles that stand in the way of the free gift the Father offers all who trust in His Son. Oh yes, there's that word: *trust*. The rich young ruler was one who could not overcome the obstacles that kept him from inheriting eternal life. He would not trust Yahshua.

"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)

But the rich young ruler's trust was in his riches:

Then Jesus [Yahshua] looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter

the kingdom of God?" And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God." (Mark 10:23-24)

So, what Yahshua said in verse 25 was the case for him:

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

(Mark 10:25)

In order for the rich young ruler to overcome the obstacle that stood between him and eternal life, he had to do what Yahshua commanded him to do. The disciples understood that this was foundational for all those who would follow Him, not just for this particular man, as some say. So they asked, "Who then can be saved?" Yahshua went on to tell them the certain<sup>2</sup> good news, which applies to all who wish to receive the free gift of salvation.

So each one must overcome the obstacles, which stand in the way of faith, which grants trust (or belief); and trusting Him completely will motivate us to obey all His commandments.<sup>3</sup> So we see from the example of the rich young ruler that eternal life is only given to those who overcome whatever would stand in the way of drinking freely from the water of life.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Romans 6:23 <sup>2</sup> Not to be doubted or denied, established as a fact. <sup>3</sup> 1 John 2:4, Matthew 28:20 <sup>4</sup> Revelation 22:17

## The Obstacles

Yahshua saw and understood the obstacles that would keep someone from coming to Him to receive the free gift of eternal life. He outlined these things extensively in the gospels, such as:

- Possessions
- Family
- Your own life

In Revelation 21 it goes on to talk about how those who do not overcome these obstacles are the worst kind of criminal, deserving of the 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)

First in the list of the worst criminals of humanity in Revelation 21:8 is the cowardly and unbelieving – those who have the

privilege of hearing from someone sent from the Father exactly what they must do in order to receive the water of life, and yet they shrink back from trusting and believing.<sup>5</sup> The rich young ruler turned out to be a coward and disbelieved the Son of God. He may not have been like all the rest of the criminals in the list of Revelation 21:8, but he became the worst of them all. ❧

### What Yahshua had to say about Family:

*"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."* (Matthew 10:37)

*"For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."* (Matthew 12:50)

So Jesus [Yahshua] answered and said, *"Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time – houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions – and in the age to come, eternal life."* (Mark 10:29-30)

*"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."* (Luke 14:26)

***It Takes a Community.***

### What Yahshua had to say about Possessions:

*Then Jesus [Yahshua], 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."* (Mark 10:21)

*And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." But God said to him, 'Fool! this night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God..." Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Luke 12:15-21,33,34)*

*"So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions."* (Luke 14:33)

***It Takes a Community.***

### What Yahshua had to say about "Your Own Life":

*Then Jesus [Yahshua] said to His disciples, "If anyone 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 will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Matthew 16:24-26)

*"He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."* (Jn 12:25)

*Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?"* (Luke 9:23-25)

***It Takes a Community.***

<sup>5</sup> John 3:18-21

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# Martin Luther

## Did He Pass the Litmus Test?

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It was October 31, 1517 when Martin Luther, as tradition has it, nailed his famous 95 theses on the Wittenberg church door, inviting a disputation on the matter under his chairmanship. Although the disputation never took place, he had unknowingly launched the Reformation with this act.

The Church's sale of indulgences had been a means to raise funds by offering spiritual merits in exchange for money. It proved to be a tremendously lucrative source in the business of soul saving, strengthened by the teaching that the dead had to expiate their sins in the flames of purgatory before passing to paradise. "As soon as the money in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory's fire springs." After all, alms-giving was a good work. It was a splendid bargain for the buyer and the seller. Little wonder that some of Luther's parishioners acquired indulgences when their sale was offered in a nearby town.

That's when the Reverend Father Martin Luther, Master of Arts and Sacred Theology, and Lecturer in Ordinary, took action "out of love for the faith and the desire to bring it to light..." He was troubled by such practices and questioned their validity. His answer, as we know, was: *sola scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide* – only Scripture, only grace, only faith.

Luther firmly believed in and relied upon the Bible as the source of truth. In his study of the epistles of the Apostle Paul he had come across verses which had given him the understanding that only through faith in Christ's redeeming passion does the Christian receive salvation. Luther's perception of the gospel was this: Christianity consists entirely in the belief in Christ; the



substance of Christ's teaching is unimportant. Or in his own words, "The Gospel does not teach us what we must do or leave undone, but says: God has done this for you, has made His Son flesh for you, has had Him gone to death for you."<sup>1</sup>

All good works, from mere monastic exercises to the most fruitful self-sacrifice, are of no account before God and have no effect and value in His sight. All we can do is to throw ourselves on Christ's mercy and believe in Him, to act and suffer in faith. By "good works" Luther meant especially those forms of ritual piety recommended by the Church – fasting, pilgrimages, prayers to the saints, Masses for the dead, indulgences, processions, gifts to the Church; but he also included all "works, whatever their character."<sup>2</sup>

Christianity is a continual exercise in feeling that you have no sin although you sin, but that your sins are

<sup>1</sup> *Unterrichtung wie sich Christen in Mosen sollen schicken*, Vol. XVI, p. 367 <sup>2</sup> *Works*, II, 316 <sup>3</sup> *Werke*, XL, 436; XXV, 330, 142, 130; *Werke* (Erlangen), XVIII, 260



thrown on Christ.<sup>3</sup> Luther defines love and charity as purely spiritual qualities, stating that for Christians there must be a spiritual way of approach, but “for the rough people, for Master Everybody one must set corporally and roughly about the task, and force them with the sword and the law, and to be outwardly pious, as wild beasts are kept with chains and cages.”<sup>4</sup>

Of course he does not question the need of charity and love for a healthy social life, but not as a criterion for faith, justification, and salvation.

Faith deals with a person’s eternal standing before God but not with his temporal standing in the world. The efficacy of the sacraments depends on the faith of the recipient and not on his forms and formulas. Faith is an individual matter, producing a mystical (invisible) church.

### The Litmus Test of True Faith

The book of James presents a litmus test for those who would claim to possess saving faith. James stressed the importance of faith *working together* with works. He called faith by itself (not having works) a *dead faith*.<sup>5</sup> According to James, those who don’t realize that faith without works is useless, can be described as foolish. Luther rejected the book of James as “an epistle of straw” since it did not agree with his doctrine of “justification by faith alone.”

As recorded in John 2:23-25, there was a time during a Passover in Jerusalem when many believed in Christ, actually in His name,<sup>6</sup> seeing the signs which He did. But

Yahshua did not entrust Himself to them, because He knew what was in them. The Greek text indiscriminately says *believe*, but Yahshua distinguishes what *kind* of belief it is, as to whether a person believes in his mind or his heart.

Paul distinguished, too. He taught that salvation was dependent upon believing in the heart, and he also explained that such faith results in obeying and comes by hearing a qualified preacher, or a “sent one,” as he calls it.<sup>7</sup> This is completely in line with Christ’s teaching, who made it clear that no one could receive Him without receiving the one whom He sends.<sup>8</sup> The qualification for such a sent one is John 7:18 (seeking the glory of the one who sends), and the qualification for receiving faith is John 7:17 (being willing to do God’s will). So faith is ministered from someone who is *doing* God’s will to someone who is *willing* to do His will.<sup>9</sup>

*This says it all: Saved by God’s doing alone, for the purpose of carrying out the works He has ordained for those He saves. That’s why saving faith can only come to those who are willing to do His will. After all, He bought us with His precious blood for a purpose. Would anybody in his right mind go into a store and buy something with his precious, hard-earned money that wouldn’t be useful to him or serve him?*

Receiving faith in this way is believing in Him the way Scripture teaches, with the promise that such a one will have rivers of living water flowing out of him.<sup>10</sup> And this water will

flow over to others, giving everlasting life to them as well.<sup>11</sup> That’s the Spirit and the bride saying, “Come!”<sup>12</sup> And this bride has prepared herself through doing the righteous deeds of the saints.<sup>13</sup> In other words, nobody is qualified to proclaim the gospel except those who are *doing* the righteous deeds of the saints.

<sup>4</sup> *Wider die himmlischen Propheten*, Vol. XVIII, p. 66 <sup>5</sup> James 2:14-26 <sup>6</sup> *Jesus* is the English transliteration of the Hebrew name *Yahshua*, which means “YHWH’s Salvation” or “I am mighty and powerful and save” – a befitting name for the Savior of the world. See page 7 for a more detailed explanation. <sup>7</sup> Romans 10:9-17 <sup>8</sup> Matthew 10:40-41; John 13:20 <sup>9</sup> Matthew 10:41 <sup>10</sup> John 7:37-38 <sup>11</sup> John 4:14 <sup>12</sup> Revelation 22:17 <sup>13</sup> Revelation 19:7-8 <sup>14</sup> Titus 2:14

Deeds are obviously very important, so much so, that Christ gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good deeds.<sup>14</sup> So the redeemed doing good deeds is obviously the purpose of His redeeming sacrifice. For by grace you have been saved through faith *for works* – not just to go to heaven.<sup>15</sup>

This says it all: Saved by God's doing alone, for the purpose of carrying out the works He has ordained for those He saves. That's why saving faith can only come to those who are willing to do His will. After all He bought us with His precious blood for a *purpose*. Would anybody in his right mind go into a store and buy something with his precious, hard-earned money that wouldn't be useful to him or serve him?

Paul then goes on to tell the Ephesians that these righteous deeds of the saints are what they'd been saved to do. In Ephesians 4:12,16 he makes it clear that this work of ministry of the saints is for the building up of the Body of Christ. In other words, these works represent church life. Now we can see why the apostles established an actual, real community when they established the church.<sup>16</sup> It wasn't an *invisible* church, as Luther fancied, but it was a city on a hill, as Yahshua taught – a light to the world, where everybody could observe the church life, the good works of the saints, and glorify God in heaven.<sup>17</sup>

Since the church was such a city on a hill, we can see the works. They are obvious. They were of one heart and one mind. They lived like a big extended family, having their meals together with joy and gladness of heart. They had been forgiven, cleared from guilt, and they obviously enjoyed being with each other. Nobody claimed anything he possessed as his own, but they had all things in common. There was nobody among them that lacked anything. They simply did not live for themselves but laid their lives down for each other, being continually engaged in the deeds of love and charity they'd been saved for. And they knew that they had passed out of death and into life because they were loving each other in works and truth.<sup>18</sup>

To Luther the teachings of Christ were not important because all that he knew about works was that they

were of no benefit or merit in regard to salvation. By this thinking, he reduced the gospel to only the redeeming and atoning sacrifice of Christ on behalf of sinners. It became the gospel of going to heaven. However Christ and His apostles preached the gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore to the apostles the teachings of Christ were *very* important, because teaching others to keep the commandments of Christ would establish His kingship or the Kingdom of Heaven.

In His last words to them He had commissioned them to make disciples and to teach these disciples to observe everything that He had commanded them during the years He had spent with them. In obedience to this teaching they established the community in Jerusalem.

Christ wants a *visible* church, because He wants to demonstrate to the whole world what life under His rulership is like. Luther had no wish to establish a church along these lines, as is clear from his attitude towards those who wanted to implement these things from the gospel.<sup>19</sup>

*The Gospel does not make goods common, except in the case of those who do of their own free will what the Apostles and disciples did in Acts iv. They did not demand, as do our insane peasants in their raging, that the goods of others – of a Pilate or a Herod – should be common, but only their own goods. Our peasants, however, would have other men's goods common, and keep their own*

*goods for themselves. Fine Christians these! I think there is not a devil left in hell; they have all gone into the peasants.*

Of course Pilate and Herod were not part of the church and what the apostles established was binding only within the church. But in the church, where by the Holy Spirit the love of God had been poured out in the heart of every believer, everybody just did what love demanded. For how can the love of God be in a person who has the goods of the world and yet closes his heart while seeing his brother in need?<sup>20</sup> It is interesting to note that James, in his epistle of straw, would call such behavior a dead faith, or a faith without saving power.<sup>21</sup>

At first, in the community in Jerusalem, there were no needy among them. Some years down the road, however, someone wrote a letter to the community in Jerusalem reminding them that, "Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever." He was charging them to remember those who led them, who had spoken

*The gospel is the gospel  
because it is the gospel.  
In other words, the gospel  
cannot change and still be  
the gospel. And the gospel  
will prove its authenticity  
by bringing forth the same  
fruit it did when it was  
authentic, as at Pentecost  
after Christ's ascension.*

<sup>15</sup> Ephesians 2:8-10 <sup>16</sup> Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37 <sup>17</sup> Matthew 5:14-16 <sup>18</sup> 1 John 3:14-24 <sup>19</sup> T. Münzer, *Hochverursachte Schutzrede*, Mülhausen, 1524  
<sup>20</sup> Romans 5:5; 1 John 3:17 <sup>21</sup> James 2:14,17,20,26 <sup>22</sup> Hebrews 13:7-9

the word of God to them, and warned them to not be carried away with various and strange doctrines.<sup>22</sup> In essence, the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews was calling them back to the standard the apostles had established in the beginning, as this is the pattern and foundation of how the church is to be, yesterday, today, and forever.

The gospel is the gospel because it is the gospel. In other words, the gospel cannot change and still be the gospel. And the gospel will prove its authenticity by bringing forth the same fruit it did when it was authentic, as at Pentecost after Christ's ascension. And what it brought forth was authentic as well. The quality of life, the selfless love it produced in the disciples, showed that Christ resided in that place by His Spirit. So when a little while later, persecution arose against this church, Christ Himself defended it, saying, "Why are you persecuting Me?"<sup>23</sup>

This is the faith that was once for all delivered to all the saints.<sup>24</sup> Not just a *doctrine*, but the *faith*. Faith is persuasion, the persuasion in the atoning sacrifice of Messiah for the remission of sins so that the Holy Spirit can be imparted, and the persuasion to do the deeds one has been saved for, in the visible church of the redeemed. This is saving faith. ✠

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<sup>23</sup> Acts 26:14

<sup>24</sup> Jude 3

## Inconsistencies

It's instructive to see how Luther moved from tolerance to dogma as his power and certainty grew. One comes across many contradictions along the way and sees that his teaching is not to be easily understood.

He proclaimed freedom of conscience in matters of faith, and the right of every individual to interpret the scriptures, and then repudiated this when, as a result of such policy, many sects arose. Then he instituted and enforced a new dogma to insure unity.

He opposed most violently and successfully the distinction between priest and layman, to then later on preserve or create a priesthood in the Lutheran church.

He proclaimed the integrity of the secular order and then supported the princes in their struggle against the supreme secular head.

He stated that the commands of law have no divine quality, and yet promised that even heavenly rewards would follow on their observance.

He acknowledged that the princes are immoral and unreliable, yet put in their hands, unreservedly, the material and spiritual welfare of the people.

He opposed and accepted usury.

He did away with sacraments if they were not expressly enjoined by Holy Scripture, but retained the sacrament of infant baptism on the basis that Scripture says nothing against it.

He argued that it was only the faith of the participant that made a sacrament efficacious, to then declare that the faith of the assembled congregation makes the sacrament of baptism efficacious for the infant.

He argued that the Jews should be forgiven for keeping their own creed under the fools of the "Romish Church," and advised dealing kindly with them in order to win them, but later hurled the greatest invectives against them and called for the sternest judgments and measures against them.

He claimed Scripture to be the sole and final authority in matters of faith, thereby dethroning the pope, yet stated that his doctrine could not be judged by anyone, even by the angels, and that anybody that did not receive his doctrine could not be saved.

Luther's apologists have had to advance excuses for these inconsistencies for centuries, while his enemies eagerly point them out. But there is no revelation outside of having the commandments of Christ and keeping them.<sup>1</sup> The commission of the apostles was to make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to keep everything they had been commanded by Christ.<sup>2</sup> All those who were devoted to that teaching were together and shared all things in common.<sup>3</sup> There is no revelation apart from that life. Untaught people do not have these commandments. Hence untaught people do not live the life that comes as a result of keeping the commandments. *Untaught, unstable and unprincipled* people twist the Scriptures to their own destruction.<sup>4</sup> ✠

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<sup>1</sup> John 14:21-23 <sup>2</sup> Matthew 28:18-20 <sup>3</sup> Acts 2:42,44 <sup>4</sup> 2 Peter 3:16

# 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

*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 happen 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; Matthew 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> Matthew 13:9,15; Luke 14:26-35 <sup>12</sup> Matthew 10:40; John 13:20

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

<sup>13</sup> Hebrews 2:15; Luke 9:24; John 12:25; Revelation 21:7-8 <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



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, sixty, 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>25</sup> Matthew 13:3-9; John 15:8; John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:14-18 <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; Revelation 22:14 (KJV, NKJV) <sup>43</sup> Matthew 21:43 <sup>44</sup> John 17:23 <sup>45</sup> 1 John 4:17

The beginning of the book of Acts describes the vibrant life of the first Church in Jerusalem. This *new life* was the result of hearing the full, unadulterated good news through Peter and the other apostles on the day of Pentecost:

*And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." (Acts 2:40)*

Peter spoke these *many other words* in obedience to Yahshua's parting command to the apostles to "*teach them to obey all I commanded you*" in Matthew 28:19-20. So the many other words consisted of Yahshua's commands to forsake family, possessions, and even your own selfish life, in order to receive the new life that He came to establish on the earth. The result of hearing and believing the message Peter preached that day was that "*all those who believed were together and had all things in common.*"<sup>1</sup>

Obedience to the comprehensive gospel will *always* produce a community where disciples are happy living together – laying down their own lives daily to meet the needs of their brothers and sisters, because all are obeying the Master of their new lives. In fact, there is *no possibility* of obeying Yahshua's commands outside of community life, where all things are shared in common and you actually dwell together in peace and harmony.<sup>2</sup> That is why the angel commanded Peter in Acts 5:20 to go stand in the temple and speak "*the whole message of this new life,*" in order that others could be added to those who were already gathered.

The people in Jerusalem knew that something miraculous was happening among these people who were coming together with great joy and enthusiastically sharing all they had to care for one another. It was necessary for them to hear the *whole message of this new life* in order for them to understand what was happening in their midst. The new life, apart from the whole message, was incomprehensible. Likewise the message, apart from the *transcending life* of community, had no authority or credibility.

What message would modern Christians preach today? What life would they point to as the fruit of Christ's teachings and His

# IT TAKES A COMMUNITY

sacrifice? Let's be honest here. There really is no discernable difference between the lifestyle of today's Christians and other good people in secular society. How could they call others into a new life, when the life they live is the same?

Yahshua did not condemn the people of the nations for seeking after food and clothing, but called those who followed Him to live by a higher standard – that they would seek first *His Kingdom* and *His righteousness* and absolutely trust Him to meet all of their needs.<sup>3</sup> People have varied opinions about what this means, but the blueprint of the life His disciples went on to live is there for all to see.

*Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. (Acts 4:32)*

It is recorded twice in the book of Acts so we can understand that there is *no other way* the Church can be than a *community*, which is the witness that will cause the world to believe in Yahshua.

*"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35)*

*I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. (John 17:23)*

## The Way, the Truth and the Life

*Jesus [Yahshua] said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (John 14:6)*

Yahshua is truly the way, the truth and the life. But how do you get to Yahshua? Who can show us the way to the Way?

When Yahshua knocked Paul off of his high horse, He had a question for him: "Why are you persecuting Me?" Who was Paul persecuting except His Body on the earth?<sup>4</sup> Yahshua had gone to be with the Father and left them as His ambassadors, reconciling men to the Father through

Him.<sup>5</sup> In the book of Acts it's recorded that the early believers were often referred to as: *The Way*. Those who "discerned the

Body,"<sup>6</sup> recognized Yahshua in His people, who carried on His ministry with the greater works He had given them to do on His behalf.<sup>7</sup>

*Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. 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. (John 18:37)*

Those who are *of the truth* will hear His voice and join themselves to Him, becoming part of His Body, through which He continues to bear witness of the truth. Like Yahshua, it is the very purpose they were born for. Yahshua spoke in John 18:37 from His humanity ("I was born") and from the Divinity (the Word) who dwelled in Him ("I have come into the world"). For the uncreated can never be born, but the Man Yahshua was born for the very Word of God to dwell in.<sup>8</sup>

## The Spirit and the Bride

In the same way now, His Spirit dwells in His Body, otherwise known as *the Bride*.<sup>9</sup> In Him was life – the light of men;<sup>10</sup> but now the life of the Spirit is in *her* – His people. So it is "the Spirit and the Bride" who now say "come, drink of the Water of Life,"<sup>11</sup> which is the Holy Spirit. Yahshua continues to be the Way, the Truth and the Life – in His people in whom He dwells by His Spirit.

So the invitation in Revelation 22:17 is for all who are thirsty to "come drink the water of life *freely*." The word *freely* there, in the original Greek, means *without cause* – without any other cause (wealth, family ties, personal goals, etc.) that would keep one from drinking the water of life. The rich young ruler had a higher cause in his heart than following Yahshua. But Peter understood that all who truly follow Him, will forsake every other cause to drink the water of life.<sup>12</sup>

Remember, He said you will know them by their fruit.<sup>13</sup> There is no other way the Way can be than the way the Way was when it was *the Way*. It takes a Community! ❧

<sup>1</sup> Acts 2:44 <sup>2</sup> 1 Peter 2:9-12; Psalm 133 <sup>3</sup> Matt 6:31-33 <sup>4</sup> Acts 9:1-5 <sup>5</sup> 2 Cor 5:18-20 <sup>6</sup> 1 Cor 11:29 <sup>7</sup> John 14:12; Eph 2:10; 4:16 <sup>8</sup> 1 Tim 2:5; John 1:1,2,14 <sup>9</sup> Rev 19:7,8; 21:9 <sup>10</sup> John 1:4 <sup>11</sup> Rev 22:17 <sup>12</sup> Matt 19:27 <sup>13</sup> Matt 7:20

# Friends & Enemies

*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. (1 John 2:15)*

*What is love?*

*What is the world?*

*What does it mean to love the world? Do you love the world?*

*This is an important question, as the consequences are rather serious.*

*Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:4)*

*Are you an enemy of God?*

*Or are you His friend?*

*How do you know?*

*The Master told His twelve disciples, "You are My friends if you do what I command you."<sup>1</sup> But what was His command?*

*This is My commandment, that you love one another just as I have loved you. (John 15:12)*

*So what is love? Is love a feeling?*

*How did He love His disciples?*

*The answer to this question settles the matter of whether you are a friend or an enemy of God. Do you want to know?*

## Friends of God

The Greek word translated *love* in the verses above means the direction of the will towards whomever or whatever one finds his joy in,<sup>2</sup> which is inescapably revealed in how one spends his time, money, and energy.

The gospels show us exactly how *Yahshua*\* spent His time and energy. He did not take one thought for Himself. His attention was always on His disciples. He was always serving them, teaching them, encouraging them, and correcting them. It was His full-time occupation. And then He died for them.

Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. (John 13:1)

That is how He loved them. And that is how He commanded them to love one another.<sup>3</sup> They were to lay down their lives for one another daily.<sup>4</sup> It was to be their full-time occupation. It was no accident or mistake that the church began as a community, as the book of Acts records:

*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. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:44-47)*

Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the

\* For more on the name *Yahshua*, see *What's in a Name* on page 7<sup>1</sup> John 15:14<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 12:2<sup>3</sup> John 13:34-35<sup>4</sup> John 15:12-13; 1 John 3:16-17; Luke 9:23; Acts 2:46; Hebrews 3:13; 12:15

things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. (Acts 4:32-35)

Living together in community was the only way they could practically obey their Master's commandments, to give up everything to follow Him,<sup>5</sup> and to love one another as He had loved them,<sup>6</sup> and to seek first His kingdom without worrying about what they would eat or what they would wear.<sup>7</sup>

How can anyone not worry about where his food and clothing will come from? Only if his brothers and sisters are taking care of his needs. In the true Body of Messiah all are continually serving one another according to each one's particular grace and gifting,<sup>8</sup> doing the works prepared for them to walk in.<sup>9</sup> That is how each one practically obeys the command to "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness," with the result that each one has everything he needs.<sup>10</sup> Someone has the grace and gifting to take care of the clothing needs for the community, while someone else makes sure there is healthy food on the table, while others work to provide an income, to maintain their dwellings, to teach the children, to shepherd the flock, etc. Every member of the Body labors on behalf of all, and none need be anxious for their own life.

That is how disciples love one another. They direct their will toward the One they love, who lives

in their brothers and sisters. Only by loving and serving them can they practically love and serve Him.<sup>11</sup> He lives where they live, and He honors those who serve Him where He lives<sup>12</sup> – in the community of the redeemed. They are His friends, and He reveals Himself to them because they obey His commandments.<sup>13</sup>

### Enemies of God

So who are His enemies? They are those who claim to be His friends, but do not obey His commandments.<sup>14</sup> They claim to love Him, and even to love one another, but the lion's share of

*What the Bible calls "love" is not a feeling. It is the direction of your will towards the object of your love. Your love is measured by what captures your attention, by what you take delight in, by where you spend your time, money, and energy.*

their time and energy is consumed in making a comfortable life for themselves in this world.

Remember, what the Bible calls "love" is not a feeling. It is the direction of your will towards the object of your love. Your love is measured by what captures your attention, by what you take delight in, and by where you spend your time, money, and energy. That is the fact of the matter, regardless of how you feel.

Whom or what do you love? What is the direction of your will?

*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. (1 John 2:15)*

What is the world? What are the things of the world?

*For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:16-17)*

There are the obvious things – television, movies, sports, luxuries, lust, pursuit of wealth and power. But these are merely the outward manifestations of living for one's self. That is the root of the problem. You must hate your life in this world.<sup>15</sup> Until you reach that point, you remain a friend of the world and an enemy of God.<sup>16</sup>

*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:26)*

### Love versus Hate

Just as "love" in the Gospels is not merely a feeling of good will or affection towards someone or something, neither is "hate" a feeling of animosity or malice. When the Master called His disciples to follow Him, He was demanding nothing less than a 180° turn in the direction of their will. That is what it means to repent, to hate one's life in this world, and to begin serving Him where He is.<sup>17</sup>

*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 4:21-22)*

<sup>5</sup> Mark 10:29-30; Luke 14:33 <sup>6</sup> John 13:34-35; 15:12-13 <sup>7</sup> Matthew 6:31-33 <sup>8</sup> Romans 12:1-13; Ephesians 4:16; 2 Corinthians 5:15

<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 2:10 <sup>10</sup> Matthew 6:31-33 <sup>11</sup> 1 John 4:20; Colossians 1:24 <sup>12</sup> John 12:26 <sup>13</sup> John 15:12-15; 14:21 <sup>14</sup> 1 John 2:4 <sup>15</sup> John 12:25

<sup>16</sup> James 4:4 <sup>17</sup> John 12:25-26

Until that day all their time and energy had gone into making a living with their father, and suddenly the direction of their will changed and all their time and energy went into serving their new Master. Their father might well have taken their newfound love for this Messiah as hatred towards himself,<sup>18</sup> but they could not serve two masters.<sup>19</sup> They had to forsake the gods of making their own living and pleasing their parents in order to follow Messiah.<sup>20</sup>

It was the same with all of the disciples, as Peter declared, "See, we have left all and followed You!"<sup>21</sup> The Master's reply to Peter reveals the result of this redirection of the will, the result of hating one's life in this world in order to love and obey Him:

*So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time – houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions – and in the age to come, eternal life." (Mark 10:29-30)*

The result is the common life described in Acts 2 and 4 (quoted previously), the community of those who were redeemed from their lonely, futile existence in the world, and given the full-time occupation of loving one another just as He loved them. In place of whatever they left behind they would receive a hundredfold new brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, children, houses and farms – along with persecution from those who love this world and hate the true message of the gospel and the abundant life it produces.

## Friend or Foe?

What is the direction of your will? What consumes your time and energy? Is it love for the world and the things of the world? Or is it love for the people and the things of God?

*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. ... 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. 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? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but*

*What is the direction of your will? What consumes your time and energy? Is it love for the world and the things of the world? Or is it love for the people and the things of God?*

*in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:14-18)*

It does not say, "We know that we have passed from death to life because we asked Jesus into our heart." How would you know whether He accepted the invitation?<sup>22</sup> The validity of our belief is tested by what we *do*<sup>23</sup> – by the direction of our will, not by what we think or feel. It is according to whether we do the principal thing that the Master said would distinguish us as His disciples:

*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)*

How can you love your brothers just as Yahshua loved His disciples, laying down your life for them, if you only see them once or twice a week? Living your independent life insulates you from actually seeing your brother in need (materially or otherwise) so that you can comfortably withhold your life and livelihood from him and spend it on yourself. But the true gospel produces a life of true community in which it is possible to obey the commandments, the foremost of which is to love one another – to lay down your life for your brothers each and every day. It takes a community.

Apart from the common life of true believers dwelling together in unity,<sup>24</sup> demonstrating that the love of the Father is in them,<sup>25</sup> all that remains is the love of the world, and the things of the world – the life of those who are...

*...separated from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Ephesians 2:12)*

So have you arrived at a conclusion? Are you a friend or an enemy of God? Are you with Him or against Him, gathering or scattering?<sup>26</sup> What is the direction of your will?

We would like you to gather with us in one of the places where He has caused His name to dwell, where brothers are living together in unity. Perhaps you didn't even know there was such a place. Some of our communities are listed at the end of this freepaper. You are always welcome! ☸

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 10:34-39; Luke 12:51-53 <sup>19</sup> Matthew 6:24 <sup>20</sup> Even the Master Himself had to make this choice to risk offending His earthly mother in order to do the will of His heavenly Father (Mark 3:21,31-35). <sup>21</sup> Mark 10:28 <sup>22</sup> John 2:23-24 <sup>23</sup> John 13:17; Matthew 7:24; John 14:15,21,23,24; Rev 22:14 (NKJV) <sup>24</sup> Psalm 133; John 17:20-23 <sup>25</sup> Romans 5:5; 1 John 3:17 <sup>26</sup> Matthew 12:30

# Circle of Disciples

*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:26-27)*

**A**s Yahshua\* said these things to His followers, perhaps He thought back to the time when even He had to disregard the words of His own mother, Miriam. That day He had been sitting in the house with His circle of disciples and the crowds of people who hung on His every word. Filled with the Holy Spirit, He was speaking to them in parables, but the priests and the Pharisees were outraged. “Who does this nobody from Nazareth think he is, telling the people that the religion of today is corrupt? We are the ones chosen to teach about God... this man has lost his mind!”

Word had reached His mother and brothers that He had gone crazy and that He had a demon! What could have happened to Him since that day so long ago when He was a small boy and yet He confounded all the teachers in the temple with His deep understanding of the Law and the Prophets? Why weren't those same men accepting Him now? Surely He must have gone off... Something had gone wrong... She must go immediately and get Him before it was too late.

But remember the words of Simeon back when He was just a little baby and Mary and Joseph had brought Him to the temple to be dedicated? “Behold this child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be spoken against. And a sword will pierce even your own soul...” (Luke 2:34-35). What did that mean? Why would the Messiah be spoken against? Shouldn't He be received with great pomp and ceremony? Certainly something wasn't right.

So off she went with her other sons to rescue Him. When she arrived at the house it was so packed full of people that she couldn't even get in. People were sitting and standing anywhere they could, just to hear what He was saying, just to catch a glimpse of Him. And there were the Pharisees, filled with jealousy toward this imposter who was stealing all their loyal disciples away and telling them the truth. How they hated the truth,



grinding their teeth at every word that shined a light into their dark souls, revealing that they were really nothing but hollow shells that produced no fruit.

## Leaders and Laity

The Master had said to them, “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing the fruit of it.” (Matthew 21:43) They were the leaders of a dry and mystical religion that had no love in it, nor any semblance of a link back to God. But still, they were the leaders. They obeyed the law meticulously, so they didn't need love or joy or peace or patience, gentleness, self-control, or any of the things that this man talked so much about. However, it was these very qualities that captured the hearts of the people. The leaders had the Law of Moses and the traditions of Judaism, which had been passed down for hundreds of years. Now all their people were being misled by this blasphemer. They would have to do something to gather their sheep back into the fold, or else they would lose their entire nation.

So there was Miriam, Yahshua's own mother, hearing all the things these respected leaders were saying about her Son. But did she remember the words? “...and a sword will pierce your own soul to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” Did she understand that the very thoughts of their hearts were being revealed?

\* For more on the name Yahshua, see *What's in Name* on page 7

## His Circle of Disciples

“Can you please give this message to my son?” she asked the nearest bystander. “Please tell him that his mother and brothers are here to see him... We need to talk to him right away.” She waited anxiously for him to come running out. “Surely he’ll come out to talk to me after all I’ve done for him. I mean, I am his mother.”

He would never want to split up families, especially his own family, would he? Would God ever ask such a thing? After a moment or two, she noticed a hush come over the crowd. She strained her ears to hear if the message had made it to him... Then she heard the reply. Yes, she knew it came from him, she knew his voice so well. “Who are my mother and my brothers?”

Desperately pushing aside those in her way she made her way close so He could see her. But she noticed Him looking around at His circle of disciples who were sitting tightly around him... then He was motioning to them.

“Behold my mother and my brothers? For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.” Like a knife the words plunged into her soul. He would not come out... He was devoted to those people sitting with Him in there. He would stay with them.

The words of Simeon resounded in her heart with unmistakable clarity. Now she understood. He had now become the sign that would be spoken against. He had become the witness of God on the earth that would be opposed by all the spiritual forces of the evil one. And the evil one was manifested in the leading men of their religion – the preachers of their congregations and synagogues. They were the ones speaking against Him.

But He didn’t care what the religious leaders thought of Him. No, He was gathering people who would set themselves apart to do

the same thing He had – to be holy and set apart, a nation separate from the world.

He would establish the true kingdom of God on the earth, even if it separated mother from son and brother from brother. He would not compromise or let the gospel be watered down. He wanted a circle of disciples who would take on His own heart. Therefore He said, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35) How could His disciples have true love for one another if they all lived their own separate lives? How could their love be shown as a witness so that all men would know and be persuaded that they were true disciples unless they shared a common life together?

## Obeying the Gospel

The Master never meant for there to be divisions and dis-unity among His followers. He wanted there to be love and care to show how God really is.

In John 17:11, just before He was brutally murdered, the Master had earnestly prayed the greatest desire in His heart, “I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Father, keep them in Your name, the name You have given Me, that they may be ONE even as You and I are ONE.”

Is His prayer relevant today? Shouldn’t what was so important to the Master back then be just as important today? It had enough weight then that people were abandoning all their possessions and their families to be a part of it. But now most who claim to follow Him are still living their own independent lives and maybe going to church once or twice a week. And they say about the Master’s words, “Oh, that was for back then. Things are different now.” But why shouldn’t the gospel be obeyed today just as it was in the beginning? Can’t we break out of the sleepy religious traditions we have grown up with



*“Behold my mother and my brothers? For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”  
Like a knife, the words plunged into her soul.*

and recapture the vitality and excitement of those early believers we read about in the Book of Acts?

Yes! Now there is a group of people who are obeying the gospel with all their hearts. They are actually living a life of love and unity, laying down their lives for each another every day. They are getting back to the roots of the true church, the community, not living their own selfish lives, all the while believing that they are doing the will of God. They really live together in community, just like the first church did back then. They deny themselves daily, putting the words of their Master into practice in their own lives, not reasoning them away and excusing their lack of obedience to the gospel He preached. ❧

# The Real Down-to-Earth Jesus

I grew up in a traditional Protestant family. We went to church every Sunday. Every year my family went to a Christian family camp where people of all ages came to go "farther out with Jesus" — to a retreat. Every year after that camp my family would "get serious for God." But slowly we would settle back down into our daily routines and the cares of life would come upon us, and the emotional high from camp would wear off. For me camp was like my gas station. But I would run out of gas way before the next camp.

In high school, I questioned a lot of what I heard in church and even at that camp. I started seeking outside of Christianity for spirituality. In college I mixed Jesus into every different religion and philosophy that I tasted. I started to use drugs as a means for religious/mystical experience. I always believed that Jesus was there with me, as well as Buddha, Ghandi, Timothy Leary, Jerry Garcia, etc.

At the end of my first year I had decided to actually read the entire New Testament. I started with the gospels. By this time I had HIPPIE-FIED Jesus. I read and read and I couldn't put it down. There were things that Jesus said that I had never heard in church or at camp. I read about the radical love He had. How He traveled and spoke of the Kingdom of God, having no place to lay His head. How His disciples abandoned everything to follow Him. When I began reading Acts I got more excited. I read in chapters 2 and 4 that they shared everything and lived communally.

I began to attend a Pentecostal church as well as a home group Bible study. That summer at camp I was convicted of my pot smoking and seeing Jesus as a hippie mystic. I straightened up and became zealous for God, attending services and meetings every time I had a chance. At one Bible study I was sharing about how the first disciples lived

communally, and a woman there told me about a church that lived that way in the '70s and they were still fairly communal today. Immediately I went there to spend a few weeks. I read a book about how that community began. I was fascinated. Although they no longer lived together there was always something going on in that church. There I got caught up in the nostalgia of the Jesus Movement of the '70s. I immediately joined the church and moved to that town.

I would ask from time to time about what it was like when they lived together. I would get responses like, "It was too hard; we couldn't do it," and "I didn't like other people having their say in my family's life." When I would express my burden to live together and share everything, they would fondly say, "Oh, you should have been here 30 years ago," and "You were born in the wrong generation." But some would say, "Go ahead and try."

I was willing to make the sacrifice, but I couldn't find others who were willing. I would wonder how they could say, "It's too hard." Isn't the Holy Spirit strong enough to bring it about? Isn't God's love strong enough? Eventually I didn't think so much about Acts 2 and 4 and living together. I just went with the flow in my church.

A few years went by and while attending a Messianic Jewish conference in a neighboring city, a flicker of hope came to me. I went outside for some fresh air and met a couple of men who told me that they lived in a community of believers who lived like Acts 2 and 4. One of them said he used to be a pastor of a Pentecostal church and he gave it all up to live in this community. I was astonished to hear of a pastor quitting his pastorate to live out the New Testament. Immediately I was drawn to them. I talked all about them to the people who took me to the conference.

So the first chance I got I took time off of work and went to visit. It

didn't take long to see that it wasn't a certain set of rules that held them together, or a charismatic guru-type person persuading everybody. It was true, genuine love! It was the kind of love that I wanted but had never seen before, the kind of love that called all to live for others, not themselves. They had the heart to give up everything and make the sacrifice that it takes to live out Acts 2 and 4. It was the genuine love of God that was poured into their hearts.

I quickly saw that it was not some utopian hippie idealistic dream, but down-to-earth reality. I saw where the rubber hit the road. I saw that though I was willing, I did not in myself have the kind of love that it takes to live that life. But I wanted it. I wanted a clean new start. I wanted to be truly saved from my sins. I wanted to be able to love like Jesus loved, as I saw demonstrated there. I knew they were the only ones who had it, so if I wanted it, I would have to get it from them.

They told me that I could get it from Him, the real down-to-earth Jesus whom they called by the name *Yahshua*. I could have the same Holy Spirit that they had if I would give my life to Him and make the sacrifice to build His Kingdom. That sacrifice was my life, my own sovereignty. I had to make Him Sovereign in reality, and live it out every day by loving and sharing with the community of God. So down I went into the waters, being cleansed and set free from my sin, and up I came with a resurrected life to give totally to my King and my new family. Now every day I can serve Him where He is (John 12:26), and love my brothers as He teaches (John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:14-19). I am so thankful! 🙏







# Ed meets the Edah<sup>1</sup>

## the Parable of the Lone Bee

### The Edah

God has given us many wonderful examples in creation to teach us His ways. There is so much we can learn from the life of the beehive. We marvel with fascination at the selfless devotion of the little bees that literally wear out their wings serving the hive. Each bee does his part in an amazing society that is continually growing and developing. Their life is beautiful to behold and the produce of the hive is sweet and life giving.

In the Hebrew word *edah* there is a key to understanding the beehive. This word helps to unfold the mystery of the *new life*<sup>2</sup> God wants to establish on the Earth. In Jeremiah 30:18 – 31:1, we see a picture of the restoration of the people of God in the latter days. Jeremiah 30:20 uses the word *edah*,

*Their children will be as in days of old, and their community [edah] will be established before me; I will punish all who oppress them. (NIV)*

The word *edah* also means *swarm* or *beehive*, as in Judges 14:8. It comes from a root word that means *witness* or *testimony*.

<sup>1</sup> *Edah* (ay-dah) is a Hebrew word that was used in the Old Testament to describe the community of Israel as well as a swarm of bees or a beehive; it comes from a root word that means *witness* or *testimony*. <sup>2</sup> John 1:4; Acts 5:20

### Ed Meets the Edah - A Parable

Meet Ed. Ed is a leafcutter bee. Leafcutter bees are very similar to the common honeybee, yet they have very different habits. Leafcutter bees are solitary bees, meaning they don't produce colonies as do social insects such as honeybees, nor do they make honey.

Ed decided long ago to buzz along a different path than most leafcutter bees. As a youngster Ed used to read the Book of the Honeybees. He would imagine himself being a member of the special colonies, bringing honor to the great queen. He understood that only those who were born of the queen could be part of the beehive.

One day Ed met a traveling carpenter bee that had a very special message for him. The boisterous bee told Ed that, by the mercy of the great Creator, he could be born again and become part of the mystical hive of the honeybees. All he had to do was believe in the great queen and ask her to come into his heart. The good news filled Ed's little bee heart with great joy. He was so lonely and wanted to be part of the fellowship of the great hive. Ed bowed his antennae and whispered a little prayer. The carpenter bee, quite pleased with his new convert, heartily welcomed Ed into his new life in the hive. Ed merrily went on his way telling any bee who would listen of the great kindness that was available in the queen bee.

One day as Ed was buzzing along about his bee business he encountered another very zealous bee busily collecting nectar



from a nearby flower. "Greetings! I'm Ed, the honeybee. Who are you?"

"Hello," said the little bee, "I'm a scout bee from the nearby hive. We just swarmed into the area. I'm collecting nectar for my friends!"

"Nearby hive?" asked Ed.

"Yes, we're over there in the big oak tree, you are welcome to come and see the wonderful life we share together."

"Well" said Ed, "I also have a very wonderful life. I am part of the great hive, you know. We live our lives in devotion to the great queen."

"Really" said the little bee, "Where is this great hive?"

"All over, my friend! I meet brothers and sisters wherever I go."

"That's very interesting," said the little bee. "I wish I could stay longer and talk, but I must get back to the hive, for there is much to do to meet all the needs. Please come and see us if you can. We would love to have you!"

So the little bee buzzed away and left Ed to ponder the encounter. He was very intrigued

by the kind spirit of the little bee and his talk of a wonderful life together with other bees. At the same time he was a little concerned that such bees could send the wrong message to potential bee-lievers that you would have to actually *do* something to be a honeybee. After all, it didn't actually say in the Book of the Honeybees that you have to live in a hive. You only have to believe in the queen. Perhaps, thought Ed, he would have to help

There were busy bees everywhere he looked. Each one seemed to have a particular function in the hive. Some were cleaning. Some bees were making food. Some were caring for the young. Some were doing repairs on the hive and building new rooms for the new life that was continually coming forth. Some of the bees were doing a little bee dance, while others looked on and began to join in the dance. Ed marveled at how the hive seemed to be like one living organism – like a body, every part working in harmony with the others – for the good of the whole community.

"Hello Ed, I'm so glad you could come!" Ed turned to see the smiling face of the little scout bee whom he had originally met. "Have you ever seen anything as wonderful as the life of the hive?"

"Yes, well it's interesting..." replied Ed.

They were interrupted as a group of worker bees approached, greeting Ed and offering him some honey and beebread. They began excitedly asking him questions about his life and telling him about the recent swarm and all the activity of the hive. More and more of the bees gathered around as the queen proclaimed a special celebration to welcome their guest. Ed could hardly bear all the attention he was getting.

As amazing as the life of the hive was, Ed could hardly see it. Somehow he felt very threatened by the things he heard from the honeybees. They seemed to think one had to live in a beehive in order to be a honeybee. But Ed personally knew many good honeybees that were not part of any hive. Ed determined that, although these bees were very nice and hospitable and had many admirable qualities, he didn't think he could ever live the life they were living. He just wasn't interested in opening his life to so many others. He could see that



these fanatical bees with their understanding of what it meant to be a honeybee.

So with a sincere heart to help these poor misguided little bees, and a measure of curiosity, Ed charged off in the direction of the big oak tree. Soon he came upon a very amazing sight. He had never seen so many bees in his brief bee lifetime. The hive was teeming with activity. As Ed approached the colony a few guard bees flew to meet him. "Hello, welcome! Where are you from?"

"I'm Ed, the honeybee. I was invited by one of the bees that live here."

"Really?! How wonderful! Please come in," said the guard bees.

Ed could hardly believe his little compound bee eyes at what he saw as he entered the hive.

this was a very demanding life. He could sense that if he stayed he would probably be very limited in following his own pursuits. So he bid his host farewell and began to crawl toward the entrance of the hive.

"But where will you go," asked the little scout bee.

"Well, you know, we all have different callings, my brother. It's just good to know there are fellow honeybees out there like you all," replied Ed. "I need to go and spread the good news about the hope that's in the great queen."

"But Ed," said the little bee, "We have that same hope. But we know that our faith has made us part of a living hive with sweet produce. Our life is a witness of the goodness of our Creator."

"Well, yes, I couldn't agree more. But you can't limit that life to your little hive. There are many out there that the Creator wants to reach out to," said Ed.

"Yes, yes, we know that's true, but His heart is to bring them home and restore them to the purpose He has for their life, all the bees working together, not one seeking for his own good, but rather for the good of the community where everyone is cared for, and no one is overlooked." Then the little bee looked at Ed compassionately and said, "Ed,



I have to tell you something, because I really care about you and I think you should know."

"Yes," said Ed, "What is it?"

"You see Ed... the truth is that you're not a honeybee."

Ed was instantly offended. "How can you say such a thing, after all the great work I've done for the queen?"

"But can't you see Ed, that no bee can possibly do the will of the queen apart from the true hive? A lone honeybee could never bear the fruit of the hive."

So what is Ed going to do? What would you do? The honeybee is a social creature. If a true honeybee becomes separated

*Once again in these latter days, this life is being established as a witness on the earth.*

*from the hive it will die within a very short time...*

### New Israel

In Jeremiah 30:20 it speaks of the time when God will establish His community, His witness – His Body on the Earth. And then a few verses later in Jeremiah 31:1, it says,

"At that time," declares the LORD, "I will be the God of all the families [clans, tribes] of Israel, and they shall be My people." (NIV)

Here we begin to get a picture of the new Israel<sup>3</sup> that will be established by God in the latter days.<sup>4</sup> This is what Yahshua\* was referring to in Matthew 24:14,

<sup>3</sup> Galatians 6:16; Ephesians 2:12 <sup>4</sup> Daniel 2:44 <sup>5</sup> Colossians 1:13 <sup>6</sup> For more on the name Yahshua, see the article *What's in a Name* on page 7

*And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. (KJV)*

Yahshua preached the good news of a Kingdom that was coming on Earth, just as it was in Heaven – the same Spirit, the same love. Obedience to the gospel that He preached would transfer one out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of the light.<sup>5</sup> This is not a mystical kingdom, but actual communities of believers that would set the evidence of God's love for man and the salvation that is in His Son before all the world. This is what Yahshua prayed for right before He was crucified,

*I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in Me and I am in You, may they also be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. The glory that you have given Me I have given them, so that they may be one, as We are one, I in them and you in Me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent Me and have loved them even as you have loved Me. (John 17: 20-23, NRSV)*

Beehive... swarm... community... witness... testimony... A life of brothers dwelling together in unity,<sup>6</sup> loving one another as He commanded them,<sup>7</sup> encouraging one another daily,<sup>8</sup> seeing to it that no one falls short of grace...<sup>9</sup> A life of fellowship, which is a sharing of all that you have and all that you are, considering others more important than yourself.<sup>10</sup>

## The Life of the Five

Imagine a life where all you do is for the sake of others. Somehow

that didn't appeal to Ed, the lone bee. But those who know Messiah and follow Him walk as He walked.<sup>11</sup>

Imagine you are a carpenter. You work in the woodshop. Your little industry helps to meet the needs of your household. This is your gift and your contribution. Then someone else washes your clothes, and others make your meals, still others teach your children, others clean the house, others shop for food. So much needs to be done

***Beehive... swarm...  
community... witness...  
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as He commanded them,  
encouraging one another  
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no one falls short of grace.***

to meet all the needs, but you're needed in your area. You can't do it all. But you do what you do because you love your friends. They serve you in their areas because they love you. And all of you function together like a body to glorify the Head – your King, Yahshua.

Such a life was seen on the earth 2000 years ago for only a brief moment. It is recorded in Acts 2 and 4.<sup>12</sup> But in a short time their loved faded and so did their light. They stopped doing the self-sacrificing deeds of love they did at first.<sup>13</sup> They could no longer live together and share all things in common; they gathered less and less,<sup>14</sup> until it was only once or twice a week.

They were no longer qualified to be His witness as they lost any

evidence in their lives of the fruit of the Spirit, but rather dissension, factions, denominations, strife, envy and all the other fruits of the flesh crept in. They conformed more and more to the world,<sup>15</sup> until the time came when there was hardly any difference between the world and the church.

## The Stone Kingdom

Yet the promise remains of the restoration that Jeremiah spoke of in the latter days. This is the same Kingdom that the prophet Daniel spoke of in Daniel 2:44,

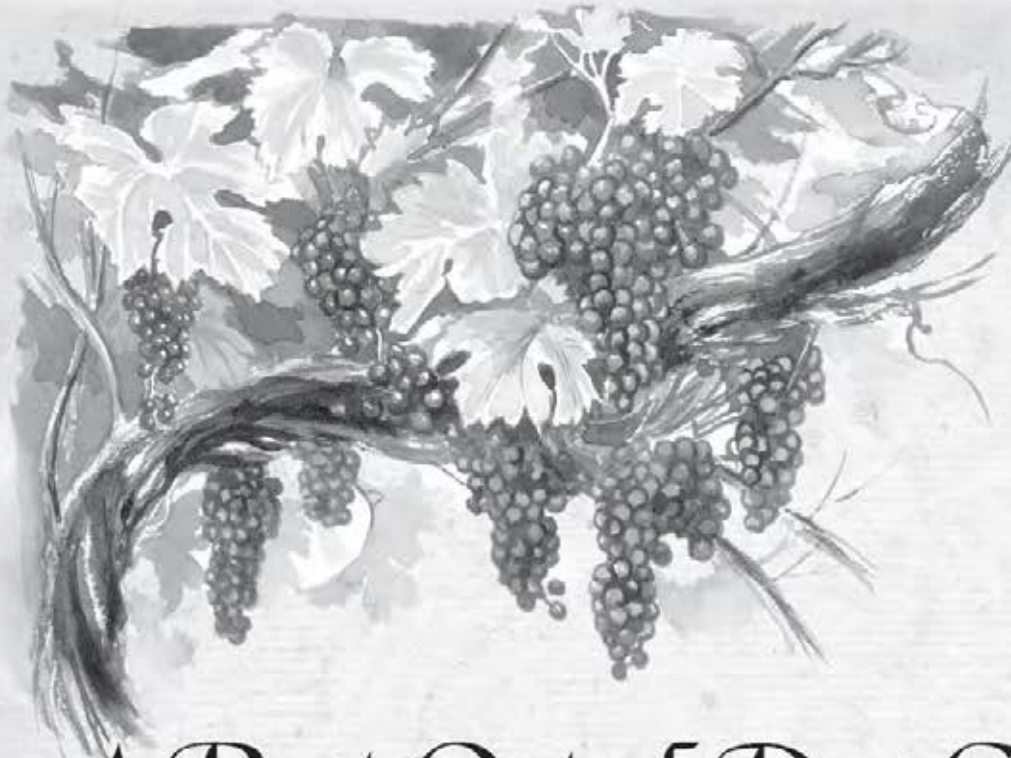
*And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. (NASB)*

Once again in these latter days this life is being established as a witness on the Earth. There are communities of disciples who have seen the great worth of Messiah and His sacrifice for them. They have left behind everything that would keep them from following Him and serving Him and loving Him with all of their hearts. Together they share again the life of the "hive", which you can come and see and experience and be a part of.

You will see what Ed saw, that this is a very demanding life. It is a free gift, but it will cost you everything to truly be part of the hive. But as Paul said,

*More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus [Yahshua] my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ. (Philippians 3:8, NASB)* ☞

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 133 <sup>7</sup> John 13:34-35 <sup>8</sup> Hebrews 3:13 <sup>9</sup> Hebrews 12:15 <sup>10</sup> Philippians 2:3 <sup>11</sup> I John 2:6 <sup>12</sup> Acts 2:44-47, 4:32-37 <sup>13</sup> Revelation 2:4-5 <sup>14</sup> Hebrews 10:25 <sup>15</sup> Romans 12:2



# A Root Out of Dry Ground

*Let me sing for my Beloved my love song concerning His vineyard:*

*My Beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.*

*He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines;  
He built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine press in it;  
and He looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded worthless ones.*

*“And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah,  
judge between Me and My vineyard.*

*What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it?  
When I looked for it to yield good grapes, why did it yield worthless ones?*

*“And now I will tell you what I will do to My vineyard.*

*I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured;*

*I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.*

*I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed,  
and briers and thorns shall grow up;*

*I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.”*

*For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel,  
and the men of Judah are His pleasant planting;*

*Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed;*

*for righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress! (Isaiah 5:1-7)*

The One who identified Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob sang this love song through the prophet Isaiah about 2,700 years ago, expressing His heartache over His people Israel. He longed for a harvest of righteousness and justice from them, but they bore only the bitter fruit of division, violence, and injustice.

Seven centuries later Yahshua\* re-told Isaiah's love song as a parable to the chief priests and elders of what remained of old Israel.

*"There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vine dressers, that they might receive its fruit. And the vine dressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the vine dressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine dressers?"*

*They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vine dressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons."*

*Jesus [Yahshua] said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruit of it." (Matthew 21:33-43)*



*Of course, the Master's words that day proved true. In a jealous rage they cast the Son out of the vineyard and killed Him, and the Owner of the vineyard took it away from them and gave it to a nation that would bear the fruit.*

Of course, the Master's words that day proved true. In a jealous rage<sup>1</sup> they cast the Son out of the vineyard and killed Him,<sup>2</sup> and the Owner of the vineyard took it away from them and gave it to a nation that would bear the fruit He had longed for — righteousness and justice. But who was that nation, and how and when did they bear that fruit? And what is the nature of that fruit?

The answer to these questions is found in the Gospel of the Kingdom, which is what Yahshua

was constantly infusing into His disciples.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, it is also found in what His disciples did with what He taught them.

He often talked to them about vineyards and vines to help them understand what the Kingdom of God is like, as in this familiar passage:

*"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vine dresser... Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches.*

\* For more on the name Yahshua, see *What's in Name* on page 7. <sup>1</sup> Matthew 27:18 <sup>2</sup> Hebrews 13:12-13

<sup>3</sup> There are at least 90 direct references to the Kingdom and the Gospel of the Kingdom in the four Gospels.

*He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:1,4-5)*

Yahshua had come to restore His Father’s vineyard, which is a metaphor for His kingdom. John the Baptist had gone before Him to prepare the way by pronouncing the old vine dead and laying the ax to the root of it, calling all Israel to repent.<sup>4</sup> Then came the Messiah, just as the prophet Isaiah had foretold, “For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground...”<sup>5</sup> Yahshua was the new vine growing out of the old root system, in order to bear the fruit that His Father had begun to cultivate when He called and chose Abraham:

*“For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.” (Genesis 18:19)*

It was for the hope of this fruit that God promised to make a nation out of Abraham’s seed, and to give them the land to dwell in where they would bear the fruit of righteousness and justice as a demonstration to the nations around them of what people are like who are truly connected to Him. That is still His objective<sup>6</sup> and He still needs a vineyard.

So Yahshua came as a root out of dry ground, the Vine of His Father’s planting, but who are the branches?<sup>7</sup> You may think that you are one of them, along with everyone else who truly believes in Yahshua, but is that really what Yahshua was saying? Consider the context: He was speaking to His disciples, whom He was training to be apostles, in their last and most intimate meal together before He was crucified. He was not speaking for the benefit of the crowds that

had often gathered to hear Him teach, for they were not in the upper room that night. So to “overhear” His intimate conversation with His disciples and to assume that it applies to you is presumptuous, don’t you think?<sup>8</sup>

His apostles understood Him, for they were very familiar with vines and vineyards. They knew that a cultivated vine would be pruned to have at most twelve branches, and from those chosen branches the vinedresser would expect to obtain

*Those who lived together in clusters were a visible, tangible demonstration of what it means to be vitally connected to the Vine through the good authority and care of the branches. When those grapes were squeezed by the circumstances of their common life, what came forth was the sweet wine of love, righteousness and justice.*

clusters of juicy grapes. For the time He had been with them, Yahshua had been filling His disciples with the sap that came from the root so that they would produce the fruit of being connected to the Vine – clusters of grapes which, when squeezed, would make the sweetest wine.<sup>9</sup>

So Yahshua was the Vine, and His apostles were the branches, but what were the clusters? To discover that you must look at the “Vinedresser’s journal” to see what came forth from the branches! What the branches did is recorded in *The Acts of the Apostles*. Here is the vivid description of the first fruit that we find there:

*Then those who gladly received [the branch’s] word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the [branches’] teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the [branches]. Now all who believed were together [in a cluster], and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:41-47)*

Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the [branches] gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus [Yahshua]. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the [branches’] feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. (Acts 4:32-35)

Was this not the fruit of righteousness and justice that ought to come forth from Abraham’s seed? Not just individual acts of righteousness that men may do for the sake of conscience, but a collective demonstration of the righteousness of God. It was a great cluster of fruit, reminiscent of the one the twelve spies brought back as a foretaste of their promised land, which took two men to carry between them on a pole!<sup>10</sup> For that is in fact what that community in

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 3:3-12 <sup>5</sup> Isaiah 53:2 <sup>6</sup> Matthew 21:43 (quoted above) <sup>7</sup> John 15:5 <sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:29 <sup>9</sup> John 2:1-11 was prophetic of this outcome.  
<sup>10</sup> Numbers 13:23



Jerusalem was to be: a foretaste of the Kingdom to come – a witness, a testimony. Those who lived together in clusters were a visible, tangible demonstration of what it means to be vitally connected to the Vine through the good authority and care of the branches.<sup>11</sup> When those grapes were squeezed by the circumstances of their common life, what came forth was the sweet wine of love – righteousness and justice. Abundant grace was upon them all, therefore all were cared for.

Now some will say that the community life described in Acts 2 and 4 was an abnormal growth and was not the typical fruit of the Vine. They will even say that the branches are no longer necessary, nor are the clusters, but instead the individual grapes come forth directly from the Vine. But it was the giants<sup>12</sup> of selfishness and independence that drove away the faith of those first-century disciples.

It is convenient to believe that the early disciples ceased living together in communities, but in fact the pattern established in Jerusalem was repeated wherever the apostles went,<sup>13</sup> as that was the grace of apostleship – to bring about the obedience to the faith.<sup>14</sup> Often in his letters, Paul would send his greetings to a particular brother *and the church that is in his house*.<sup>15</sup> Contrary to some modern translations, it does *not* say “the church that *meets* in his house.” The *church* in those days was not a *meeting*, but the full-time occupation of disciples dwelling together in unity, in extended households,<sup>16</sup> like clusters of grapes hanging from their branch – continually devoted to their apostles’ teaching and fellowship.<sup>17</sup>



*By the beginning of the second century, when the letter of James was written to the twelve tribes “scattered abroad,” they no longer shared a common life. They were “going to church” rather than being the church; the rich looked down their noses at the poor, not meeting their needs; there was strife, competition, and boasting over worldly pursuits.*

The Hebrew word for *branch*<sup>18</sup> comes from a root word that means to *cause to spring forth*, and that is what apostles do. They cause clusters (communities) to spring forth by preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom.<sup>19</sup> This causes faith to enter the hearts of those who hear and are willing to do the will of the Vinedresser.<sup>20</sup> Faith causes them to obey the gospel they are hearing, utterly surrendering their independent lives and all their possessions<sup>21</sup> to become part of the cluster – the hundredfold inheritance of all who obey the gospel.<sup>22</sup>

Many clusters on a branch form a tribe, and twelve tribes form the nation<sup>23</sup> that bears the fruit of the Kingdom.<sup>24</sup> That twelve tribe nation<sup>25</sup> is the fullest expression of the Vine, showing the whole world the goodness of that Vine by the splendid clusters of fruit it bears – interconnected communities full of whole-hearted disciples who love one another in the same way their Master loved them, by daily laying down their lives for one another, taking care of each other’s needs.

That expression of righteousness and justice was the witness of the

<sup>11</sup> John 13:20; Matthew 10:40; Luke 10:16 <sup>12</sup> Numbers 13:30-33 <sup>13</sup> As in Thessalonika, for example, 1 Thessalonians 2:14. <sup>14</sup> Romans 1:5

<sup>15</sup> Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:2 <sup>16</sup> The apostle Paul had been well aware of this pattern of life even before he was saved, for it says he entered every house, dragging off men and women to prison (Acts 8:3). Did he have to steal a church directory to find the house of each individual church member? No, everyone knew where the disciples lived; their large households were always buzzing with activity, like a beehive, which in fact is what the Hebrew word for *community* actually means. See *Ed Meets the Edah* (page 49) for more about this. <sup>17</sup> Acts 2:42 <sup>18</sup> *Tsemach* (#6780 in Strong’s Concordance) – a sprout or branch (literal or figurative); from *tsamach* (#6779), a primitive root meaning to sprout (literal or figurative); bear, bring forth; to cause to or make to bud forth; to cause to or make to grow again, or grow up; to cause to spring forth, or spring up. <sup>19</sup> Matthew 28:18-20 <sup>20</sup> Romans 10:17; John 7:17 <sup>21</sup> Luke 14:26-33 <sup>22</sup> Mark 10:28-30 <sup>23</sup> Not a political nation, but a spiritual nation, as in 1 Peter 2:9-10. <sup>24</sup> Matthew 21:43 <sup>25</sup> Isaiah 49:6; Acts 13:47; 26:7; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Revelation 21:9-12

Kingdom that the apostle Paul at one time expected would bring about the end of the age<sup>26</sup> and the return of Messiah in his lifetime.<sup>27</sup> But the time came when he realized he would not live to see that day,<sup>28</sup> and increasingly his and the other apostles' letters contained dire warnings to the churches of the ways they were being led astray.<sup>29</sup> Self-appointed "apostles" undermined the authority of the true apostles<sup>30</sup> and led away their own followings<sup>31</sup> with ear-tickling teachings that softened the so-called "hard sayings" of Yahshua.<sup>32</sup>

By the beginning of the second century, when the letter of James was written to the twelve tribes "scattered abroad," they no longer shared a common life. They were "going to church" rather than *being* the church; the rich looked down their noses at the poor, not meeting their needs;<sup>33</sup> there was strife, competition, and boasting over worldly pursuits;<sup>34</sup> the rich even oppressed those who worked for them.<sup>35</sup> Gone were the succulent clusters, happily sharing the same source of life from the Vine. Righteousness and justice gave way to a form of religion lacking the power to love.<sup>36</sup>

1900 years have come and gone, leaving a trail of bloodshed at the hands of those who claim to represent God, and cries of woe from those who have suffered at their hands. It is just as the prophet Isaiah sang for his Beloved, the Owner of the vineyard, so long ago, "He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress."<sup>37</sup> Most of what has been done in His name has made a mockery of what is really in His heart. So just as in the first century, He finds Himself in need of being justified.<sup>38</sup> His name needs

to be made great again by those who have the courage to separate themselves from the fallen religious system of this day and restore the Gospel of the Kingdom. Their life, which comes from Him, is a foretaste of His coming Kingdom.<sup>39</sup>

We who write this paper have given our lives to do just that. Like a root out of dry ground, the Vine has sprouted again<sup>40</sup> and brought forth clusters – communities of men, women, and children who love Messiah more than their own lives, who desire nothing more than to abide in Him and bear the fruit of His Kingdom. When that fruit

*Like a root out of dry ground,  
the Vine has sprouted again  
and brought forth clusters  
– communities of people who  
love Messiah and who desire  
nothing more than to abide  
in Him and bear the fruit  
of His Kingdom.*

is ripe for harvest, we believe the Owner of that vineyard will again send His Son to receive its fruit:

*Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped. (Revelation 14:14-16)*

That is the first of two harvests

the Messiah will reap when He returns – the gathering of His elect,<sup>41</sup> also described as His bride, who will have made herself ready for Him.<sup>42</sup> Then they together, Messiah and His bride, will come to earth to deal with the fruit of another vine – that of the Antichrist and all of those who love and practice evil. They will be trampled in the winepress of God's wrath.<sup>43</sup> The evil ruler of this world<sup>44</sup> will be bound for a thousand years,<sup>45</sup> and Messiah will be enthroned in Jerusalem and will reign over the earth with His bride.<sup>46</sup>

Then the Promised Land, from the Euphrates River to the River of Egypt, will be delivered over to the remnant of the offspring of Abraham, the one third<sup>47</sup> who, by the end of the age had come to understand the truth of Matthew 21:33-44.<sup>48</sup> They understood that their people had crucified the Messiah sent to save them, and they mourned over their guilt.<sup>49</sup> Then the faithful "branches" of the first century will rule over the restored twelve tribes of Israel in the Millennial Age,<sup>50</sup> just as their Master promised them.<sup>51</sup> They, along with the faithful of the final century, will fill the whole world with the fruit of righteousness and justice.

*In that day, "A pleasant vineyard, sing of it? I, the LORD, am its keeper; every moment I water it. Lest anyone punish it, I keep it night and day; I have no wrath. Would that I had thorns and briers to battle? I would march against them, I would burn them up together. Or let them lay hold of My protection, let them make peace with Me, let them make peace with Me." In days to come Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruit. (Isaiah 27:2-6) ❧*

<sup>26</sup> Matthew 24:14 <sup>27</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 <sup>28</sup> 2 Timothy 4:6-7 <sup>29</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:3-4 <sup>30</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:4,13; 3 John 1:9-10 <sup>31</sup> Acts 20:29-30  
<sup>32</sup> 2 Timothy 4:3-4 <sup>33</sup> James 2:2-6; 14-16 <sup>34</sup> James 4:1-4 <sup>35</sup> James 5:1-6 <sup>36</sup> 2 Timothy 3:1-5 <sup>37</sup> Isaiah 5:7 <sup>38</sup> Luke 7:29-30 – To be baptized by John meant to renounce the religious system of that day (Matthew 3:7-12) and confess one's need for true salvation, for the coming Messiah of whom John was the forerunner. <sup>39</sup> Matthew 6:9-10; Malachi 1:5,11 <sup>40</sup> Job 14:7-9 <sup>41</sup> Matthew 24:30-31; Revelation 19:14 <sup>42</sup> Revelation 19:7-8,14 <sup>43</sup> Revelation 14:19-20; 19:11-19 <sup>44</sup> 1 John 5:19 <sup>45</sup> Revelation 20:2-3 <sup>46</sup> Revelation 11:15 <sup>47</sup> Zechariah 13:8-9 <sup>48</sup> Quoted near the beginning of this article.  
<sup>49</sup> Zechariah 12:10 <sup>50</sup> Acts 3:21 <sup>51</sup> Matthew 19:28



# THREE ETERNAL DESTINIES of MAN?

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed... (Romans 1:16-17)*

The Gospel is something that reveals the righteousness, or rightness of God, and certainly it is true that the greatest right thing that God did was John 3:16,

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

Yet it is interesting that this is not what Paul goes on to talk about in Romans 1:

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness... (Romans 1:18)*

According to Paul the ungodly and unrighteous men that His wrath is poured out upon are characterized by the fact that they suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Of course if one is met with the opportunity to respond to the good news of Messiah's sacrifice and rejects it, you could see that as suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. However, in what Paul proceeds to write he does not go in that direction:

*...because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For*

*since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:19-20)*

He says that the truth they suppress is something that is evident within them (for God has made it so). It is an inborn understanding of God's invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature. Not only is that knowledge known deep within us, but it is also substantiated through what has been made.

## The Conscience

Is this speaking of John 3:16? Is that what is known about God innately? Not according to Romans 10:14 and 17:

*How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ... So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.*

So John 3:16 is not instinctively known, but has to be heard. However, it says that all are without excuse in regard to knowing the things of Romans 1:18-32.

*For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (Romans 1:21)*

*The truth they suppress is something that is evident within them (for God has made it so). It is an inborn understanding of God's invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature. Not only is that knowledge known deep within us, but it is also substantiated through what has been made.*



What kind of knowing could they innately have of God within their very nature, and how could they honor Him as God according to that knowing? It is clear that there is a requirement put upon men based on what they are born with, which is apart from John 3:18,

*He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

Here Yahshua\* says that the one who has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God is judged already. Paul would ask, "How can they believe if they haven't heard?" Not believing indicates a conscious rejection of something that has been clearly communicated to you. It is understandable that God would hold you accountable for that. To say that God would hold accountable those who have not heard the message from a reputable source conceals, rather than reveals, the righteousness of God. Rather than giving the Gospel its power, it takes it away.

*...it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew*

*first and also to the Greek, for in it the righteousness of God is revealed...*

The Gospel derives its power from the fact that it reveals His righteousness to man. When that is revealed, the heart of those who have a will to do His will is captured and the love affair begins. It is the love that compels a person to no longer live for himself, but live for the One who died and rose again on his behalf.<sup>1</sup> The innate knowledge or understanding that Paul was talking about in Romans 1 is referred to in chapter 2 as the conscience – the

*Can it really be that there is no distinction between those who really try so hard and even suffer to do what is right according to the voice of conscience, and those who actively suppress that same truth and even exchange it for a lie?*

law written in men's hearts, and also a witness to their deeds. It is the knowledge God and man share<sup>2</sup> as to what is good and evil. Considering this it can be understood how a man, according to the understanding he is born with, can honor God. If God put the conscience in us, then when we obey that inner voice we honor Him.

*For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them... (Romans 2:14-15)*

"Gentiles" refers to those who are not believers and are outside of the Commonwealth of Israel.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, there are verses like Romans 3:23 and Isaiah 64:6 to consider:

*...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God... (Romans 3:23)*

*For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. (Isaiah 64:6)*

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and of course we fall short of the glory of God. But can it really be that there is no distinction between those who really try so hard and even suffer personal loss to do what is right according to the voice of conscience (that God gave them), and those who actively suppress that same truth<sup>4</sup> and even exchange it for a lie?



\* See *What's in a Name* on page 7 <sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 <sup>2</sup> Conscience (con-science) means to know together with; co-knowledge. <sup>3</sup> Ephesians 2:12 <sup>4</sup> Romans 1:18

*For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator... (Romans 1:25)*

This does not refer to worshipping and serving Christ, but rather worshipping and serving the Creator in the capacity of those who know Him through their inborn understanding. They do that by obeying the voice of their Creator that resides within them – their conscience.

The ones Romans 1:25 is talking about exchange that truth for a lie that suits them better at the moment, allowing them to do what they want, rather than what they know to be right. They elevate

and serve only themselves. They say in their hearts, “There is no God,” having become the fools that King David wrote of in Psalm 14:1,

*The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they have done abominable works; there is none who does good.<sup>5</sup>*

Can one honestly say (with a good conscience) that there is no difference in the eyes of God between a terrorist and a hard-working farmer who rises early and goes to bed late, wearing himself out in his struggle to feed his family? Will God send them both to the

*Can one honestly say that there is no difference in the eyes of God between a terrorist and a hard-working farmer who rises early and goes to bed late, wearing himself out in his struggle to feed his family?*

same eternal destiny of the Lake of Fire simply because they never heard the Gospel?

This is not the impression of God that Abraham had when he made a plea for the lives of the few righteous in Sodom:

*Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from Thee... Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly? (Genesis 18:25)*

### The Judgment

These considerations start to give understanding of the judgment in Revelation 20:

*And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away,*



*and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15, NASB)*

This judgment is based on deeds. Books are opened, which are the individual records of people's deeds, as recorded in their conscience. What is written in each book is according to their deeds, not their religious beliefs. On that basis, a person's name is either kept in or erased from the book of life.<sup>6</sup>

What we see in Revelation 20: 11-15 is the separation of two types, or categories of people. They are all outside of the realm of John 3:18, having never been faced with the opportunity in John 5:25,

themselves to the stature of their Creator, saying in their hearts that there is no one greater or with more authority to determine what is right and wrong than themselves (the creature). They worship, or honor

<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that Paul was quoting from this passage in Romans 3:10, showing that “There is none righteous” is not speaking generally of mankind, but of those fools who live as if there is no God, and therefore no judgment. <sup>6</sup> This is not the Lamb's Book of Life in Revelation 21:27.

Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead<sup>7</sup> will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

They never heard the voice of the Son of God, either in person or through someone He has sent.<sup>8</sup> They may have heard similar words spoken by those who claim to represent Him, but are actually seeking their own glory. For this the hearer is not accountable.

*He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him. (John 7:18)*

Those who stand in the judgment of Revelation 20:11-15 are the ones spoken of in John 5:28,

*Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.*

So there are two categories of man clearly described in the judgment of Revelation 20, each with their own destiny. They are men living according to the knowledge of good and evil they were born with. They will go to a second life in the nations of the eternal age,<sup>9</sup> or a second death in the eternal Sea of Fire.<sup>10</sup>

### Their Need for a Savior

The point of this is not to justify those who have done good deeds and say that they don't need a Savior. Apart from having a sacrifice for their sins, all men have an appointment with death,

*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus [Yahshua] our Lord. (Romans 6:23)*

*As it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment. (Hebrews 9:27)*

Doing good does not mean that one does not die, but just that his death would not be eternal, and there would be a chance for a second life after one has paid the just wages of his sin. Of course, for a person to present his good works to God as a justification for rejecting His Son's sacrifice for him would be as the stench of filthy rags. Man's righteousness is not comparable to the righteousness of God that is through faith in Christ, as Paul described,

*And may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith. (Philippians 3:9)*

***To understand that man is born with the possibility to do good is to begin to understand the value of what Yahshua did by paying for our sins. Rather than being helpless puppets doomed to a life of depravity, we sin because of choices we willingly make.***

That righteousness is only found through the Son of God. In fact as good as men can be when they strive to live by their conscience, they still remain in the enemy's camp, needing to be made friends:

*All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into his friends and gave us the task of making others his friends also. Our message is that God was making all mankind his friends through Christ. God did not keep an account of their sins, and he has given us the message which tells how he makes them his*

*friends. Here we are, then, speaking for Christ, as though God himself were making his appeal through us. We plead on Messiah's behalf: let God change you from enemies into his friends. (2 Corinthians 5:18-20, TEV)*

No truly good man would choose his own righteousness over receiving God's righteousness. He would not reject the opportunity to be God's friend. Those who reject God's kindness and mercy betray the true condition of their heart.<sup>11</sup> And this rejection of God's righteousness and friendship puts them in the category of the cowardly and unbelieving in Revelation 21:8,

*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.*

### Seeing the Worth of Messiah

To understand that man is born with the possibility to do good is to begin to understand the value of what Yahshua did by paying for our sins. Rather than being helpless puppets doomed to a life of depravity, we sin because of choices we willingly make. To sin is to do what you know you should not do, therefore it requires suppressing the voice that gives you that knowing – your conscience. It is a matter of choice. The “cowardly and unbelieving” became that way because of choices they made, just as “the abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars.”

If sin were not a matter of our own choices, but merely our lot from being born incapable of doing good, then God sending His Son to die for our sins could hardly be called mercy. Even good people have gone to great lengths to save the life of a helpless victim like a baby.

<sup>7</sup> Those who are dead in their trespasses, as Ephesians 2:1 says. <sup>8</sup> Matthew 10:40 <sup>9</sup> Revelation 21:24,26; 22:2 <sup>10</sup> Revelation 21:8 <sup>11</sup> Proverbs 16:2

But the love of God far surpasses such human responses. It enters into a dimension of righteousness that is far above that which human beings can understand in their own experience: His mercy extended to our deliberate disobedience.

The Son of God partook of man's struggle on this earth and overcame every obstacle that man faces. No man is without those moments when he has made choices he knew were bad. No man except Yahshua. He chose always to do the will of His Father, triumphantly conquering every obstacle. This qualified Him to be the spotless Lamb needed to pay for our sins. In death, He paid the full wages of our sins.

We were truly worthy of the torment of death because of the choices we made. He definitely did not deserve it, yet He chose to receive the full wrath of God that was due for the sins of the whole world.

If a man cannot see the worth or value of what He did, how could he possibly make the right response? What you pay to gain something always reveals its worth to you.

### The Righteousness of Man and the Righteousness of God

The people of the nations must struggle to live according to the voice of their conscience. Yahshua spoke about them in Matthew 6:31-32 saying,

*Do not be anxious then, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "With what shall we clothe ourselves?" For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.*

He was not condemning the Gentiles for their anxiety. Isn't it normal that people would be

concerned about how to get those necessary things for themselves and their families? They have no choice but to consume themselves with getting what they need. The issue for them is how they go about it, not the fact that they do.



*in the early chapters of Acts. The life of serving one another to meet each other's needs rather than one's own expresses His righteousness. This love between them was the sign that they belonged to Him. After all isn't that why He died?*

However, Yahshua was speaking to those who wanted to follow Him. They were those who heard the "voice of the Son of God."<sup>12</sup> To them He said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."<sup>13</sup> They were called to a higher dimension of righteousness than those locked in the struggle of working for what

they need to live. They were called to His righteousness, to partake of it by trusting and obeying Him. It was a new dimension of righteousness that would cause those who followed Him to escape the chains of self-life and actually attain to bearing the fruit of His kingdom.

Such was the life recorded in the early chapters of Acts.<sup>14</sup> The life of serving one another to meet each other's needs rather than one's own expresses His righteousness.

This love between them was the sign that they belonged to Him.<sup>15</sup> After all isn't that why He died?

*For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that One has died for all, therefore all have died; and He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised... For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:14-15,21)*

Those who have become His righteousness are His holy people, who will rule together with Messiah eternally over those who did not abandon the natural righteousness of their conscience.<sup>16</sup> For all eternity, God will dwell in His holy ones, who are His temple, and through them He will dwell with men<sup>17</sup> – the restored men and women who were raised from the first death to stand in the Last Judgment and were not found worthy of the second death.<sup>18</sup> Redeemed Man (having the righteousness of God) will rule over Restored Man (having the righteousness of man), and those who hated all righteousness will have their part in the lake of fire, which is the second death.<sup>19</sup> These are the Three Eternal Destinies of Man.<sup>20</sup> ❧

<sup>12</sup> John 5:24-25 <sup>13</sup> Matthew 6:33 <sup>14</sup> Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35 <sup>15</sup> John 13:34-35 <sup>16</sup> John 5:29; Revelation 5:9-10 <sup>17</sup> Revelation 21:3  
<sup>18</sup> Revelation 20:12-15 <sup>19</sup> Revelation 21:8 <sup>20</sup> For more on this topic, please visit [www.twelve12tribes.org/3ED/](http://www.twelve12tribes.org/3ED/)

**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 Swarm

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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53 Lincoln Ave, Manitou Springs, CO 80829 ☎ (719) 573-1907

**Community in Savannah**, 107 East 35 Street, Savannah, GA 31401  
☎ (912) 232-1165

**Community in Chattanooga**, 316 N. Seminole, Chattanooga, TN 37411  
☎ (423) 698-6591

**Community in Arcadia**, 601 W. Oak Street, Arcadia, FL 34266  
☎ (863) 494-3305

**Community in Hillsboro (Washington, DC area)**,  
15255 Ashbury Church Rd, Purcellville, VA 20132 ☎ (540) 668-7123

## CANADA (1-888-893-5838)

**Community in Winnipeg**, 89 East Gate,  
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 2C2, Canada ☎ (204) 786-8787

**Community in Nelson**, 202 Vernon Street,  
Nelson, British Columbia V1L 4E2, Canada ☎ (250) 352-0325

## GERMANY

**Gemeinschaft in Klosterzimmern**,  
Klosterzimmern 1, 86738 Deiningen, Germany ☎ (49) 9081-2901062

## ENGLAND (0800-0743267)

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☎ (44) 1823-681155

## SPAIN

**Comunidad de San Sebastián**,  
Paseo de Ullia 375, 20014 San Sebastián, Spain ☎ (34) 943-58-00-29

## FRANCE

**Communauté de Sus**,  
11, route du Haute Béarn, 64190 Sus/Navarrenx, France  
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## ARGENTINA

**Comunidad de Buenos Aires**, Batallón Norte y Mansilla 120,  
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## BRAZIL

**Comunidade de Londrina**, Rua Jayme Americano 420,  
Jardim California, 86040-030 Londrina, Paraná, Brazil  
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## AUSTRALIA

**Peppercorn Creek Farm**, 1375 Old Hume Highway,  
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