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Bible - New International Version

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Butterfly Symbol

The butterfly has been called a winged flower or flying gem because of its ethereal beauty. But a butterfly doesn't start out beautiful. A butterfly's life begins as an ugly caterpillar that hatches from an egg. These caterpillars have ravenous appetites and eat almost constantly, sometimes completely destroying crops and damaging trees and shrubs. After going through this destructive phase, the caterpillar is next wrapped in a cocoon which looks like a tomb or coffin. This phase lasts for several weeks during which it appears lifeless and dead. The third and final stage is when the cocoon breaks open and the beautiful butterfly emerges, spreading its wings to fly off into the heavens. It is a new creature, transformed and changed by the mystical process of metamorphosis.

The butterfly is a wonderful analogy of the Christian who, although beginning life as a condemned sinner who was dead in spirit and at enmity with God, subsequently becomes a new creation, with a new heart and mind that is alive and perfect with the divine nature of Christ Himself.

We therefore were buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may walk in newness of life...Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (Romans 6:4, 2 Corinthians 5:17)

The Grace Gospel

It is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no heart has imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him." (1Corinthians 2:9)

The word 'grace' comes from the Greek word 'charis' which means kindness or favor. When applied to God, it refers to His kindness to those who do not deserve it. God's salvation comes to us because of His grace, or kindness.

"For by grace are you saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves."
(Ephesians 2:8)

God's grace can be traced all the way back to the Garden of Eden to the very first humans, Adam and Eve, who represented their entire species. When they rebelled against God, after being tempted by the devil, they died spiritually and physically and that sentence of death passed on to all of mankind. There was a change inside their souls that filled them with guilt and fear. They could not even look at one another without shame. Their minds became filled with wicked thoughts and ideas and they ran to cover themselves, sewing fig leaves to hide their nakedness from one another. Their souls were now poisoned and they were destroyed spiritually. Before this, they had walked with God in the garden and enjoyed friendship with Him. Now they were afraid of God.

God is all knowing so one might wonder why God permitted Adam and Eve to be tempted in the first place. Why did He allow His human creation to make a decision that would separate them from the God who loved them and wanted to have a relationship with them? The answer is that God could not do otherwise. If God wanted a true love relationship with Adam and Eve, it was absolutely necessary that they be given the choice to obey Him or not. Without choice they would have been without personality, individuality, or freedom.

They would have resembled robots that can only function as programmed, unable to feel or express love. Nevertheless God had no intention of casting away humanity, so He did a strange thing. He made clothes from animal skins for Adam and Eve in order to cover their nakedness. He would have had to kill an animal in order to do that. It would have been the first animal sacrifice to cover the guilt of sin.

Very likely, since later animal sacrifices were most often lambs, and because the coming Savior would be described as a Lamb of God, the animal that God killed was a lamb.

And just as the divine Lamb would one day shed His blood and clothe humankind with His own righteousness, the earthly lamb sacrificed for Adam and Eve provided covering for their guilt and shame. Adam and Eve would likely have realized that God was showing mercy to them through this mysterious act. Perhaps they saw that God was, in effect, promising to cover mankind with righteousness and make him pure again sometime in the future. It's not certain how much Adam and Eve understood about God's plan for mankind, but His act of providing animal skins as covering clearly pointed to the greatest Sacrifice of all Who would one day do away with sin forever and bring great joy to His people. However, until the Savior arrived, Adam and Eve, including all their descendants, were cut off from God and placed under a death sentence.

The Holy God could no longer commune with them because their spirits were dead and their corrupted, mortal bodies were now unfit for heaven. This was how MAN BECAME A SINNER.

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

Sin is transgressing God's law and includes such things as lying, lust, cheating, deceit, anger, evil thoughts, immoral behavior and more. The Bible states that those who sin will be judged according to the light they have from their conscience, and how they respond to it. The conscience is God's moral law written on the heart. Where people resist their conscience, they will receive condemnation. Where they obey it, they will be excused. But the Bible also says: *"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away; they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good; not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes."* (Romans 3:10-18)

In order for humans to have a relationship with a perfectly holy God, they have to be as holy as He is, but as the scriptures say, man is a sinner and is not able to meet that standard.

Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:48)

Besides our conscience, God gave the 10 commandments to Moses to further explain what is required of mankind in order to be accepted by God.

These commandments comprise the Law, which must be obeyed in its entirety. Even one transgression nullifies the whole.

For whoever keeps the whole Law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. (James 2:10)

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the Law; rather, through the Law we become conscious of our sin. (Romans 3:20)

The Law silences every mouth and holds the entire world accountable to God. The Law will never declare anyone righteous in God's sight because everyone breaks the Law. This is a dilemma for humankind because GOD IS JUST and therefore MUST PUNISH SIN.

(God says) "I will by no means clear the guilty (Exodus 34:7) ^[L]_[SEP]The soul who sins shall die. " (Ezekiel 18:4)

Therefore we have a problem; we have all sinned. The penalty for sin is death. We need forgiveness so that we can have a right relationship with God. Fortunately there is another side to God. He is also LOVE. So, even though man cannot save himself, GOD IS MERCIFUL and DOES NOT WANT TO PUNISH US.

This is because GOD IS LOVE. (I John 4:8)

He says, ^[L]_[SEP]"I have loved you with an everlasting love". (Jeremiah 31:3)

Clearly, from all the scriptures in both Old and New Testaments, we can see that God has always desired His people to be in a close, intimate relationship with Himself. He loved Adam and Eve and He loves us as well. He had a plan to rescue us right from the beginning. After Adam and Eve plunged humanity into destruction, God mercifully instituted animal sacrifices to be carried out in the Temple, to signify that judgment had been carried out against sin, albeit only on a temporary basis. Animal sacrifices did not do away with sin. They only covered sin until a better Sacrifice came along that would do away with sin forever. This Supreme Sacrifice for sin had been promised for millennia, beginning with the lamb's blood shed in Eden which foreshadowed the death that would one day come to the Redeemer of mankind. He would take sin away forever and offer salvation as a free gift of grace. This Redeemer was JESUS CHRIST.

Who exactly is Jesus Christ? ^[L]_[SEP]The Bible tells us clearly that He is the infinite ^[L]_[SEP]GOD-MAN.

^[L]_[SEP]In the beginning was the Word (Jesus) ... and the Word (Jesus) was with God ... and the Word (Jesus) became flesh and dwelt among us. (John 1:1,14)

SEP

Jesus Christ came to earth and lived a sinless life, but while on earth. He died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and rose from the grave to purchase a place for us in heaven.

All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned, every one, to his own way, and the Lord has laid on Him (Jesus) the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6) SEP

For a short time, Jesus Christ was on earth like one of us. He was in the likeness of sinful flesh, although He never sinned and didn't have the dead sin nature of Adam. The curse of death did not apply to Him but Jesus willingly volunteered to represent sinful mankind, becoming the Second Adam. Being human was essential if the Second Adam was to take on Himself the penalty for sin. Being sinless was essential if the Second Adam was to escape death and resurrect into new life. This is what Jesus did for us. He became the New Creation, a new humanity that had never existed before. To become a part of this New Creation, it was necessary to be 'reborn' with Christ's life formed within us.

Rebirth (also called regeneration) is moving from a dead spiritual state to one that is alive and eternal - from the old humanity (old man in Adam) to the new one (new man in Christ).

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:3- 4)

The new creation did not inherit the sin disposition of Adam. It is an entirely new entity fashioned in the likeness of Jesus Christ, having His divine, eternal nature. As such, it is without sin.

For by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. (Hebrews 10:14)

The Law could rightfully condemn the old humanity because it was guilty of sin, but the Law can find nothing to condemn in the New Creation.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1)

You were taught to stop your old way of life. Your old way was full of deceitful desires. Now you are to be made new in the attitude of your minds. (Ephesians 4: 20-23)

Christ's righteousness is now our own. We have His nature, His heart, and His mind and are in complete unity with Him. It is impossible for us to be condemned for sin anymore. We have passed out of death into eternal life. We have come out of the Old Man and into the New, released out of bondage into freedom. We are no longer separated from God, but have been brought into close intimacy with Him. What Jesus

has accomplished for us is truly beyond what we could ever have thought or imagined! This was the great gift Jesus came to bring to all of us, and it does not depend on human effort. Only God's gracious kindness can rescue humanity. God offers salvation as a gift, not as something earned by His creatures.

HEAVEN (Eternal Life with God) IS A FREE GIFT.

The Bible says: **the GIFT of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)**

And because heaven is a gift, like any other genuine gift, IT IS NOT EARNED or DESERVED. Therefore, no personal effort, no good works, no religious deeds can get you to heaven.

By grace you have been saved through faith, and that NOT OF YOURSELVES. It is the gift of God, NOT OF WORKS, lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:8.9)

SO HOW DO WE BECOME PART OF THE NEW CREATION?

The key is FAITH

Faith is the key that opens the door to heaven.

Many people mistake two things for saving faith:

1. Just believing certain historical facts. The Bible says the devil believes in God, but that is not saving faith.
2. Just trusting God for temporary crises such as financial, family, or physical needs.

These are good, and we should trust Christ for these, but they are not saving faith!

SAVING FAITH is trusting in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

Believe (trust) on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved . . . (Acts 16:31)

Faith is like a beggar getting a gift from a King. We don't deserve the gift of eternal life. But we can have it, if we have faith. It is our faith that causes us to know that the One who raised the Lord from the dead also raises us to live forever in His presence.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions... For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:1-9)

God has reconciled us to Himself through Christ, no longer counting people's sins against them. Faith is simply taking God at His word, believing what He has said and done.

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

We are saved by faith and we walk by faith. The only works that have any eternal value are those born of faith. But this faith is not something we conjure up within ourselves or something we earn. It is given to us by God.

... it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

This is the message of the gospel that God wants the world to know.

Right at this present time God is making His appeal, asking people today:

WOULD YOU LIKE TO RECEIVE THE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE?

If the answer is 'yes', God is saying:

TRUST in what Jesus Christ has done for you on the cross, that He has died for YOU. If you are willing to be placed spiritually into Christ, it will mean that your old life (who you were before) will lie dead in the grave, and you will become a part of the New Creation, or New Humanity in Christ. Listen to what Jesus is saying....

Behold, I stand at the door and knock at the door of your life. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him. (Revelation 3:20)

RECEIVE JESUS CHRIST INTO YOUR LIFE AS LORD

...with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation, for whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Romans 10:10, 13)

He comes as Master and King. He made you. He bought you and He wants to take His rightful place in your life. Turn from your sins. Call on Him, asking Him for this gift right now. It is essential that as new believers, we follow Him only. God hates idolatry and has plainly told us that we are to worship no other gods, goddesses, nature spirits, nor any other creature or natural force. Those must be renounced and forsaken if we are to take Jesus Christ as Saviour. He wants to have our hearts entirely for Himself.

THOU SHALT HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME. (Exodus 20:3-6)

The miracle transformation of new birth is not something you can see, because it is spiritual, but you will not be able to mistake the difference in your mind and heart once you have become born again. Like the amazing transformation of the caterpillar into a butterfly, you are now entirely new and different.

To show outwardly, in a symbolic way, what God has done on the inside, Christians are baptized with water. Baptism is an enactment of dying with Christ on the cross, and being resurrected to new life in Him.

It testifies to the world that we have been placed into Christ's Body (also called the Church or Bride). Quite often a believer also takes on a new name to signify that he/she is now a new creation with a new identity. As a new creature in Christ, you will now want to know more about your new life.

The first thing to realize is that you are....

DEAD TO THE LAW

The Bible describes Christians as having been baptized into the death of Christ Jesus, buried with Him, and then as Jesus was raised from the dead, we also were raised with Him so that we might live a new life.

Our old self was crucified with Jesus (i.e. put to death) so that it cannot now control our body (the flesh), although the body's fleshly urges still exist to trouble us at times. When our physical body dies, the flesh will then be eradicated. But even now we are to consider ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. That's why it's ridiculous for us to let sin reign in our physical body so that we obey its evil desires.

Permitting sin to reign in our body is 'living in the flesh' and before we were saved, we could live in no other way. Our sin nature enslaved us.

However now, as born again believers, we surrender every part of our being to

Jesus. Sin is no longer our master.

Also, we are not under the Law anymore, which is where sin gets its power. No Law. No condemnation. No shame. And no enslavement to sin.

The Law only has authority over someone for as long as that person lives. Take for example how a married woman is bound to her husband by law as long as he is alive. However if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. If she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress, but if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man. That's similar to what happens to us when we die to the Law through Christ's death on the cross. Using the analogy of the married woman, we were released from our former husband (the old man) and are now free to be married to another (Jesus, the New Man).

By dying to what once enslaved us, we have been released from the Law so that we now live in the new way of the Spirit, instead of the old way of the written code (Law).

This doesn't mean that the Law is sinful, though. The Law points us in the right direction (Christ as Savior) and that makes it important and useful.

Before this faith came, we were held in custody under the Law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the Law became our guardian to lead us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. (Galatians 3:23-25)

Without the Law, we would not have known what sin was. How would we know what coveting is if the Law's 10th commandment had not said, "You shall not covet."

As long as we didn't know it was wrong to covet, we felt no guilt when we did so, but when the commandment came, we found it impossible to keep from coveting. We realized how weak and sinful we were and we felt condemned by the Law. It stirred up guilt whenever we coveted and we had no power to stop doing it, even when we wanted to live differently. In fact, often we ended up doing the very things we wanted to get away from.

It was like a force living inside us, waging war against our mind and making us a prisoner of sin working inside us. What a wretched existence that was!! But thanks be to God, He rescued and delivered us through Jesus Christ our Lord! And because He did, we are absolutely free from any condemnation from God's

Law.

NOT IN THE FLESH

Even though our old life (old man, old nature) was crucified with Jesus Christ on the cross and is no longer who we are, as long as we are still in our physical body, we will still have the sinful urges that used to operate in our old nature. These urges continue to work through our physical bodies - if allowed. However as Christians, we do NOT have a sin nature, and we are not IN the flesh. We have a NEW nature and we walk by the Spirit, not the flesh. The fleshly urges that still operate through the body can be overcome by our faith in who we are in Jesus. Our new identification with Christ (having His righteous nature) will provide the confidence and power to say 'no' to fleshly urges. This is why it is so important to realize by faith that we cannot be condemned because we are perfect in Christ and are free to live righteously (as all true believers desire to do).

We have the life and divine nature of Christ and that perfect life cannot be condemned by the Law. Our will, mind, and conscience have been set free to follow the Holy Spirit so that we can live righteously without hindrance. We are now at peace with God. It is amazing what God has done for us! Once we were weak and sinful, but Jesus died for us, giving us the power to overcome sin and to live victoriously and righteously for Him.

INSEPARABLE FROM THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Before we became born again, we lived in the flesh, according to bodily appetites, with minds set on fleshly desires. Our minds were hostile to God, resulting in death, and we could not please God.

Now, as Christians, we have minds governed by the Spirit, so we have life and peace. God is well pleased with us, and even though our physical bodies will die like everyone else's because of sin's effect, the Holy Spirit inside us has given us resurrection life and made us immortal. So since we are alive because of the Spirit, our only obligation is to live by the Spirit. As children of God, we can live without fear of condemnation or death. God is our loving 'Papa' and we are His heirs, even co-heirs with Jesus Christ. Whatever Jesus receives in glory, we do too.

Even though we will share in Christ's sufferings, they are nothing compared with the glory we have in Christ. We have the Spirit, who guarantees our redemption and divine adoption. Everything that happens to us in the meantime is used by

God to work out for our best.

It is important to realize that our new reborn spirit is being conformed to the image of God's Son. As God's children, we bear a resemblance to our older Brother, Jesus. God predestined us to this, and those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified. Knowing all this, how can we doubt that God is for us? And if God is for us, who can be against us? He didn't spare his own Son, but gave Him up for us all. Since He did that, how can we ever doubt that He will not also graciously give us all things? Who can possibly accuse those whom God has chosen? Since He has justified us, who can condemn us? Absolutely no one. Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble, or hardship, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword do it? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

CHOSEN BY GOD

Jesus said: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from Him comes to Me." (John 6:44-45)

Without the Holy Spirit's work in our hearts, we would never have received Jesus as our Savior. All sinners are dead spiritually and have no desire to come to God on their own. An unbeliever's mind is darkened. He is actually an enemy of God, which is exactly what we were before coming to Christ. It requires the work of the Holy Spirit to draw a person to Christ. Romans 9:16 emphasizes this: **It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy.**

It cannot depend on a person's human desire or effort because the Bible says that no one is righteous, understands, or seeks after God. Nobody - not even one person - does good. All are worthless.

As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."(Romans 3:10-12).

So unless God has mercy and changes the human heart, no one comes to the Lord on his own. Every saved person must be 'drawn' to Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from Him comes to Me. (John 6:45)

MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S BODY

Our hearts have been reborn. We are led by God's Spirit who transforms us on the inside to be willingly obedient to the new, divine nature He has put within us. This new nature is like Christ's.

God has called together the peoples of the world to reflect His grace as the Church of Christ. We are all parts of Christ's Body, and each member belongs to the others. It is in this community that God's love is marvelously illustrated to the world. It is meant to showcase divine love, which is why we are called to be hospitable with the Lord's people who are in need, to bless those who persecute us, rejoice with those who rejoice, and feel pity for those who mourn. God is pleased when we are willing to be with people of low position, and when we refuse to repay evil for evil.

It is important to Him that we guard our reputation, always doing what is right in the eyes of everyone and trying to live in peace with everyone. If we are opposed or persecuted, God desires that we leave room for His wrath because only He can avenge. This can only be done in Christ by His grace. Our part is to feed our enemy if he is hungry, and give him something to drink if he is thirsty. That will bring conviction, like burning coals, on his head.

We are people who overcome evil with good, having only one debt - to love one another. Love fulfills the Law's commandments, "you shall not commit adultery," "you shall not murder," "you shall not steal," "you shall not covet." In fact the entire Law is summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." This is the Law of Love that characterizes the Holy Spirit and energizes the Christian's heart. Because the Holy Spirit indwells the New Creation, He is the only Law we need. There is no need for an external Law of commandments.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. (Galatians 5:18)
Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (2 Corinthians 3:17)

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. (Galatians 5:1)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:23)

Now that we know our identity in Christ, there are some things we must be aware of, such as

FALSE TEACHERS

Throughout history the gospel has been distorted and its message has been weakened. Misguided and self-deceived teachers have promoted a false gospel for centuries and the end result has been spiritual chaos in the Church. The apostle Paul said that if anyone (himself included) or even an angel, preached a false gospel, they were under God's curse. Those who rely on the works of the Law are under a curse, because scriptures say that if one doesn't do EVERYTHING written in the Law, he is condemned by God. The only One who was able to obey the Law perfectly was Jesus, because He is God and therefore perfectly righteous. By making us new creatures, Jesus has set us free from the Law, so we cannot let ourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. If we place ourselves under the Law, Christ can have no value for us. Christ and the Law don't mix. It's one or the other.

For those who are in Christ, all that counts is faith expressing itself through love. Legalists try to tear us away from freedom in Christ so as to put us into bondage. They are like yeast spreading through a lump of dough. Their false teaching creeps into the Church until the whole congregation is thrown into confusion. Such agitators should be denounced and rejected as heretics, but instead they often condemn Christians who teach grace as being the heretics. Their favorite accusation is that teaching the grace gospel will lead to sinful living.

Obviously we as free people do not use our liberty to indulge the flesh. We serve one another humbly in love, fulfilling the Love Commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself." (Galatians 5:15) To bite and devour each other would be destructive, and it would be contrary to the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is opposed to the flesh and fights against it.

But we, as Christians, are not IN the flesh and we are also not under the Law.

You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. (Romans 8:9)

For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the Law, but under grace. (Romans 6:14)

When describing the acts of the flesh, we mean sexual immorality, idolatry,

witchcraft, hatred, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, etc.

Of course those who live like that will not inherit the kingdom of God. But Christians don't live in the flesh, even though they sometimes struggle against it. When the flesh rises up in our bodily members to tempt us to sin, we are not forced to obey it. The old nature, from which the flesh has its origins, has been crucified with Jesus on the cross. It was a once and for all execution. By killing off the old nature of the old humanity, the flesh has lost its power over us. The root of sin has been destroyed. Our faith in what Jesus accomplished on the cross effectually defangs the flesh, stripping it of its power over our lives.

So don't be deceived by demonic tricks from false teachers to enslave you by adding the Law or manmade rules to the gospel as requirements for salvation or Christian living. The Law has been fulfilled in Christ and we are free from its bondage. Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with religious rules and traditions. These kinds of people pretend to be humble and claim they have had revelations of angels, or special prophecies that give them greater authority than the apostles themselves! They do this in order to entrap and seduce others into accepting their authority and influence. Their unspiritual minds are full of arrogant ideas, but they have no connection with Jesus Christ. True believers don't submit to worldly rules that forbid this or that. These rules are merely based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations might appear to be wise, but they cannot make anyone holy.

Some of these false teachers in the Church who oppose God's grace may not even be true Christians. A person's actions reveal whether one is truly a believer in Christ. If a person lives to please his flesh, it reveals the true state of his heart. Living by the flesh will only bring destruction. If a person lives to please the Spirit, he will reap eternal life from the Spirit. We were chosen in Christ for this, to be holy and blameless in His sight.

God, our Father, has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ for this very reason. He adopted us as His children in accordance with His pleasure and will. Our amazing God has given us this glorious grace through His Beloved Son, whose blood has redeemed us and through whom we have received forgiveness of sins. All this, because God has predestined us from eternity and desired to pour out His love on us lavishly by giving us a new nature, a new Master, and a new home.

WHERE IS HOME?

We have been saved by grace and are now alive with Christ because of God's

great love for us and because He is rich in mercy. He has raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

This is not just symbolic, but an actual spiritual reality.

Christ is now in heaven seated at the right hand of His Father, and because we are in Christ and one with Him, we are there too. It is impossible to be lifted any higher than this.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:6)

Ruling with Christ means...

WARRING AGAINST SIN AND UNRIGHTEOUSNESS

God saved us so that throughout the coming ages He might show the amazing riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us. That's what grace actually is - God's kindness.

We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do, and these are faith works, not those arising out of human effort. We are now God's people and also members of His household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the Chief Cornerstone. In Christ we are building blocks joined together as the holy temple in which God dwells by his Holy Spirit. There is one Body and one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. He gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (as gifts) to equip His people in the Church for Kingdom service on earth. Expansion of the kingdom happens through the spread of the gospel but there are enemies of the gospel who seek to diminish what Christ has done for mankind. We must be strong in the mighty power of the Lord when facing them.

Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities, and powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. God has provided us with spiritual weaponry to battle them - heavenly armor that protects us when evil comes, enabling us to firmly stand our ground. [1] [SEP]

OUR SPIRITUAL ARMOUR

We have the **belt of truth** buckled around our waist. Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life" so this symbol speaks of the protection Jesus' words give us in the

battle against the lies and deceptions of the enemy. Without understanding truth, we can be carried about by false doctrines and by the trickery of men.

We also have the **breastplate of righteousness**. This breastplate symbolizes the righteousness Jesus Christ has given us, making us new creations in Him. As Christians we have a new identity and a divine nature that is free from condemnation and guilt. This protects us from the accusations of the enemy who seeks to destroy us by making us afraid of God and unsure of His love. Knowing that we are perfect in Christ is essential to gain spiritual victory over sin and guilt.

Our **feet are to be shod with the gospel** of God's grace which symbolizes going out to reach the lost who have never heard of the salvation of Jesus Christ. Wherever we go, we are to have a ready answer for those who ask us the reason for the hope within us. The Lord wishes to add many more to His Kingdom through the preaching of the Good News.

The **shield of faith** extinguishes all the flaming arrows of the evil one, protecting our hearts as we rest on the promises of God. Our faith resists the tormenting doubts and fears that can attack the mind when facing difficult circumstances.

The helmet of salvation symbolizes the renewed mind which guards and protects our thought life and replaces false ideas and thoughts with the spiritual reality found in Jesus Christ. Understanding our salvation releases us into freedom. We are able to come to God with bold confidence in seeking answers to our prayers.

The **sword of the Spirit** is our offensive weapon with which we resist the enemy, cutting through his lies and turning aside his attacks. It symbolizes the Word of God, which has great authority to overcome any deception or oppression. With God's Word firmly anchored in our hearts, power is unleashed into our lives to overcome all obstacles.

We can also pray with power in the Spirit, knowing that He hears us and delights to answer our petitions.

Not only do we have the Holy Spirit to answer our prayers, but we have something else to aid us in spiritual battle. We have God's..

ANGELS

“See that you do not despise ^{one} of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven

their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 18:10)

There are many examples of angelic ministry in the early Church.

Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with ¹indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."(Acts 5:17-20)

Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off his hands. Then the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and tie on your sandals"; and so he did. And he said to him, "Put on your garment and follow me." So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people."(Acts 12:7-11)

Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert. So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. (Acts 8:26-28)

However even with our spiritual armor, the angels, and God's promises of provision and protection, we are not exempt from struggling in various.....

TRIALS

Trials are unpleasant and they will test our faith, but through them we learn to persevere and this leads to maturity.

Besides, in the midst of difficulties and challenges, we have God's wisdom which He gives generously without finding fault, as long as we believe and do not doubt. But if we doubt, we are like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed around by the wind. Doubters are double-minded. They have the mind of the flesh and do not receive anything from the Lord. But those with faith have open doors to

God's power and might.

A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. (James 1:8)

Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:15)

One area in which our faith is often tested is in the area of finances. Some of us live in humble circumstances and this can bring hardships and temptations that the wealthy do not have to contend with. However, the poor should remember their high position in the Lord and glory in the fact that they are deeply loved by God.

The rich, meanwhile, should remember that their wealth will pass away like a wild flower, wilting in the scorching heat of the sun. Riches are unpredictable and can easily fade away. But whether we are rich or poor by this world's standards, we can be encouraged by the fact that all who persevere under trial will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

When trials come and we are tempted, it is never God tempting us. Our fleshly desires can entice us to desire wrong things so that we are led into sin. Sin always leads to death, but believers do not consistently live evil lives. They walk by the Spirit.

..if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. (Romans 8:13)

The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.

The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are **in** the realm of the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:6-8)

You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.

But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death (because of sin's curse), the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. (Romans 8:9-10)

God may use trials and temptations to mature us, but He never lays snares for us, and He never acts as the tempter. Rather, God gives good and perfect gifts, all of which have come to us through Jesus Christ.

As Christians we have a high

HEAVENLY CALLING

As ambassadors of Jesus Christ our greatest desire is to have courage so that Christ will be honored in our lives, even to the death. After all, to live is Christ and to die is gain. It's hard to choose which one is better. If we depart this life, we get to be with Jesus, but if we remain on earth, we get to preach the good news to the world. It's much better, of course, to be with Christ, but it's beneficial to other believers to encourage and uplift them in the Lord.

Either way, we just want to boast in Jesus, and glorify His name. In fact everything else on earth means nothing compared to knowing Jesus Christ.

Next to Him everything else has no value. All that matters is that we are in Christ and have His righteousness, which makes us completely blameless in His sight. We rejoice, forgetting what is behind and looking forward to all God has purposed for us. Now we focus on heaven where our citizenship resides. Heaven is where new creations in Christ are registered. We make up the Temple of Jesus Christ and our membership is in the family of God. The Father is our Papa and Jesus is our King, sending us on missions as ambassadors to the world, proclaiming the wonderful news of what Jesus has done for humanity. We tell people that Jesus created the world and it is for Him that all things exist, both in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities. Everything has been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

Jesus is supreme above everything else.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind...He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father,

full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-19)

Our heart is where Christ is, and we need to always remember that we have been raised with Christ and are seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly realms. We have died, and our life is now hidden with the glorified Christ. We have taken off the old nature with its practices and we have put on the new nature. All we know about God, salvation, and the new creation is in the.....

WORD OF GOD

We believe God's Word, convinced that all Scripture is God-breathed. His Word is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that we may be equipped for every good work.

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture comes from the prophet's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever brought about through human initiative, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2Peter 1:20-21)

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

DEEDS

Some might think that faith and deeds can exist independently of one another. While it is true that works can stand alone without being motivated by faith, the opposite is not possible. Faith without deeds is not real faith. Deeds actually illustrate faith's reality. Believing in Jesus Christ intellectually is not a definite sign that a person is a Christian. Even the demons believe in Christ's existence, but obviously that is not enough. Actions are required to show that our faith is true and that we are no longer part of the world.

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:15-17).

The person who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. It's like spiritual adultery. Christians should be aware of this. Scripture says that

God's Holy Spirit indwelling us jealously longs for communion with our recreated spirit. God wants us for Himself. He has chosen us in Christ to be His very own children, with hearts and minds focused on Him.

Spiritually, He has taken us out of the world to dwell with Him in the heavenly realm.

The world is all about pride and self-advancement, two things God hates. He opposes the proud and shows favor to the humble, so its important for us to submit ourselves to God and resist the temptations of the world and the devil. If we resist Satan, he will flee from us. If we come near to God, He will come near to us. This is why we purify our hearts from worldly obsessions and live with one goal in mind - to humble ourselves before the Lord so that He might lift us up.

PRAYER

When we are in trouble, we know we can pray. When we are happy, we can sing songs of praise.

If we are sick, we can call for the elders of the church to pray and anoint us with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer offered in faith will make us well and the Lord will raise us up.

Jesus said: Truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete...John 16:23-24)

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of Him.(1John 5:14)

There are certain times when we may not get the answers we want to our prayers, such as in situations where we have brought sickness or misfortune upon ourselves.

At those times we may come under God's....

DISCIPLINE

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by Him.

For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons.

For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them.

Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time, as it seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:4-11)

Christians being disciplined by God is not the same as God's judgment on the wicked.

“When we are judged . . . by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world” (1 Corinthians 11:32).

God uses discipline to correct and train us in righteousness. Because we all still struggle with the flesh, we periodically fall into sin and God encourages us to turn away (repent) from sin and draw nearer to Him.

The ultimate, final judgment for unbelievers will be eternal separation from God but Christians will never be condemned or lose their relationship with Him. When the apostle Paul used the term “judgment” to describe the discipline to be practiced in the Church, he was not referring to the kind of condemnation that unbelievers will experience. He used the term ‘judge’ in the sense of evaluation.

“What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?” (1 Corinthians 5:12).

This kind of ‘judgment’ exists in the house of God, but it is not the same as what those outside the Church will experience. The outcome for the ungodly sinner will be destruction and great suffering. But if, as Christians, we suffer on earth according to God's purpose, we need only commit ourselves to Him and continue to do good. God will most assuredly provide us with all we need to live a godly life and to comfort us in our afflictions. He has already, through the knowledge of His Word and through His promises, given us a new divine nature, enabling us to escape the world's corruption caused by evil desires. That's why we make every effort to add to our faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

As these qualities increase, they will make us effective and productive in our Christian walk. Living righteously will never allow us to stumble. Rather, by living in that way, we can be assured of a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But what about someone who says that he is a believer but his actions indicate otherwise?

The Bible says that there are some in the Church who have forgotten that they have been cleansed from their past sins, and so may occasionally fall into sin, but if they live habitually in the flesh, they need to examine themselves to make sure they are indeed saved.

They may be.....

FALSE BELIEVERS

If a professing believer claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister, its a sure sign that he is still in the darkness because love for the brethren is a characteristic of light. Love for the things of the world is another way to distinguish a true believer from a false one.

If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him.

Everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—will one day fade into nothingness. It is useless to pursue wealth, possessions, power, and fame because they do not last. Materialism is a sign that a person is focused on things that belong to the darkness. The trappings of fame and fortune will never fulfill anyone, which is why we Christians set our eyes on Jesus and eternity. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever and does not abandon the faith, thereby showing that he is a true believer in Christ. The ones who abandon their faith were never truly Christians in the first place. True believers have an anointing from the Holy Spirit, so we know the truth. Liars however deny the truth, saying that Jesus is not the Christ. No one who denies the Son has the Father, but whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father and is assured of eternal life.

Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. (John 5:23)

So we need to watch out for those who try to lead us astray. We have the anointing we received from the Holy Spirit so consequently we do not need anyone to teach us. His anointing teaches us about all things.

We know that Christ is righteous, and we know that everyone who does what is right has been born of Him. Loving one another proves that we have passed from death to life, while the one who does not love remains in death. Christ said that hatred is like murder, so anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and we know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

Such a person is dead spiritually and does not have the love of God in him. We can know what love is by taking a look at Jesus who laid down His life for us. We also ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. For instance, if anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, the love of God obviously cannot be in that person. Love, if it's authentic, is not just with words but with actions too. If we live out the love inside our hearts, then we will have confidence before God. Our conscience will be clear and we will have the assurance that we will receive from God whatever we ask, because we keep His commands and do what pleases Him.

OVERCOMERS

We have the courage of Jesus Himself as we face dangers and opposition in the world. As new creations in Christ, fearfulness and timidity are foreign to our new natures.

"God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind"(2 Timothy 1:7)

You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.(1John 4:4)

The way to overcome fear is to have complete trust in God, even in the darkest times. This trust comes from knowing that God is good and is always on our side, and this is why we love Him. Of course, loving the Father means loving His child as well. This is actually the Royal Command - to love God above all, and to love our neighbor as yourself. These two commands are not burdensome. The world may oppose us and present all sorts of challenges, but everyone born of God is an overcomer of the world. Christians live in this world, but we are not **of** the world. It is not our home and we are in fact 'aliens' on this earth. One day the world will be no more.

Jesus said: "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. (John 15:18-19)

"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. (John 17:16)

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;(Philippians 3:20)

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. (Hebrews 11:13-16)

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. (1 Peter 2:11)

END TIMES

Revelation is called the 'The Apocalypse of John'. 'Apocalypse' is a Greek word meaning the unveiling of things not known before and which needs a revelation to be understood. The Book of Revelation was written while the apostle John was imprisoned for his faith on the island of Patmos around 68 or 69 AD. His remarkable vision explained many marvelous things that would happen in the near future. It was very important to the early Church because although the believers were already facing persecution, even greater trials awaited them. They would need added encouragement to comfort them as they faced the coming trials. The apostle John encouraged the believers by showing how the crisis they were in was not really the true picture. God was actually doing amazing things that the Christians couldn't see because it was happening in the spiritual realm. Revelation pulled back the curtain so that they could see the reality. This involved seeing Jesus as He now is, as King of kings and Lord of lords, seated with the Father in heaven in the full splendor of His divinity.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

This statement is saying that the Son of God has always existed and always will exist. It refers to Christ, as God incarnate, existing from everlasting to everlasting. Isaiah described this aspect of God in several places in the Old Testament.

"I, the Lord, am the first, and with the last I am He" (Isaiah 41:4). "I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God" (Isaiah 44:6).

"I am He; I am the first, I also am the last" (Isaiah 48:12).

Revelation is full of symbols and allegorical (symbolic) language, very similar to

the language used by Jewish Old Testament prophets.

For instance, when John saw Jesus in his vision, he describes Him as having the appearance of a man with hair as white as snow, eyes like blazing fire, and a face shining with the brilliance of the sun. But this is how the Old Testament prophet Daniel described God in a vision he saw in the second century BC.

As I looked, “thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took His seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of His head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing coming out from before Him. Thousands upon thousands attended Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. (Daniel 7)

In Daniel’s account, the Ancient of Days has hair as white as wool. In Revelation, it is Jesus who has white hair, to indicate that He is divine and eternal. The apostle John was so stunned at seeing Jesus like this that he lost consciousness.

This is when Jesus touched him and encouraged him not to be afraid, saying: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”

Jesus instructed John to write down all he saw and to pass His message along to the churches in Asia, most of which had problems. Sometimes the believers were deceived by false doctrine with the result that the gospel was grossly distorted.

The apostles spent much of their time trying to correct the errors spreading throughout the churches, and in this final epistle by John, Jesus gives a direct rebuke to His Church (also called His Bride). However in every case where the Church was rebuked for her shortcomings, Jesus also gave reassuring promises of His love and grace to those who remained true to Him. He promised them the right to eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God; they would receive a victor’s crown; be immune from the second death; receive hidden manna; have authority over the nations; be given the morning star; have the privilege of walking with Him, dressed in white to show they were worthy; have Jesus acknowledge them before the Father and the angels; their names would never be blotted out from the Book of Life; a crown of victory would be theirs; they would be raised up as a pillar in the temple of God; they would receive a white stone with a secret name on it; Christ’s new name would be written on them along with the name of the city of God, the new Jerusalem; and amazingly, they would have the right to sit with Jesus on His throne! All of these wonderful things belonged to them as children of God and members of the New Creation. And they also

belong to us today!

1. **Tree of Life** - signifies immortality. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they lost access to immortality, but in Christ, we have been given eternal life.
2. **Victor's Crown** - The apostle Paul encouraged Timothy to live out his Christianity like an athlete running a race in order to gain a victor's crown. Through Jesus Christ we have victory over sin and death, and over the power of the enemy. This crown belongs to every believer. (2 Timothy 2:3-10)
3. **Second Death** - The first death is a physical death when a person dies on this earth. The second death is spiritual and permanent, when a person is condemned to eternal destruction in a 'lake of fire'. Those who belong to Jesus are immune from the second death.
4. **Hidden Manna** - The manna given to the Israelites in the wilderness provided for their physical needs. This symbolizes Jesus as the Bread of Life. Those who eat of Christ's Body (receive His life into themselves) receive eternal life and are sustained spiritually.
5. **Authority Over Nations** - Jesus rules over all the nations, and those who are His, rule with Him. We do this by praying in faith for our governments and for the salvation of unbelievers, but especially when we advance Christ's kingdom over the face of the earth through the preaching of the gospel.
"If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2:12).

And to the one who is victorious and continues in My work until the end (70AD) I will give authority over the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter and shatter them like pottery—just as I have received authority from My Father.
(Revelation 2:26)

6. **Morning Star** - Jesus Christ is described as the 'morning star' in 2 Peter 1:19 and He identifies Himself as 'the bright morning star' in Revelation 22:16. Just as the dawn star breaks forth out of darkness, bringing light to the earth, so Christ breaks the chains of darkness over His people by rising in their hearts as the Light of Salvation.

7. **Dressed In White** - It was given to her (the New Jerusalem) to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.
(Revelation 19:8)

8. Book of Life - "If anyone's name was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:15) The names of all Christians are written in the Book of Life and they will never be erased.

9. Temple Pillar - Christians are established (pillars) in the Temple of God.

10. White Stone with a New Name - A Jewish high priest's breastplate contained twelve stones, each with a name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved on it. The high priest bore the names of God's people into God's presence in this way. Similarly, the "white stone" with our name (or Christ's name) written on it could refer to our standing in God's presence. 'You have been raised up with Christ. So think about things that are in heaven. That is where Christ is. He is sitting at God's right hand... Your life is hidden with Christ in God. Christ is your life. ...You have started living a new life...Christ is everything and He is in everything. You are God's chosen people. You are holy and dearly loved. (Colossians 3:1-14)

After receiving Christ's message for the churches, John saw a door standing open in heaven. A voice spoke to him that sounded like a trumpet, and he was immediately lifted to stand before a throne in heaven with God sitting on it. John saw in God's right hand a scroll with writing on both sides. An angel told him that what was written in the scroll would happen soon.

One called the Lion of Judah (Jesus Christ) was declared worthy to open the scroll and when He did so, millions of angels joined in praising and worshipping Him, showing that Jesus is God, for only God is to be worshipped.

In one vision, John saw a woman (spiritual Israel) giving birth to a male child (Jesus Christ), although a red dragon (Satan) tried to destroy her. Christ was taken up to God's throne (symbolizing His victory on the cross and His ascension to heaven). Satan and the fallen angels were cast out of heaven because of the power of Christ's sacrifice. The dragon then tried to destroy the woman (spiritual Israel), but failed when she escaped into the desert. Next John saw Satan going on to make war on the rest of the woman's children (Christian Church). John described the persecution of the Christians by the Roman Empire, prophesying that it would last for 42 months. (November 64 - June 68 AD.) John also saw a "soul harvest" upon the earth as all of God's chosen were gathered into His kingdom.

He will use a loud trumpet to send His angels all around the earth. They will

gather His chosen people from every part of the earth...

I assure you that all these things will happen while some of the people of this time are still living. (Matthew 24:31,34)

God stated that His New Covenant people would be established in a 'new heaven and a new earth'. This was not referring to the universe as such, but to a new spiritual kingdom. A 'new heaven and a new earth' was Old Covenant language for a new age or new era.

The second half of Revelation represents Christ's victory over the world, including the Roman Empire and apostate Israel, where the two are cast into the lake of fire. Revelation 19 and 20 show the full establishment of the kingdom of God, when thrones were put in place for the millennium. The saints took possession of the kingdom and the millennium began. ('Millennium' is also not meant to be taken literally. It simply refers to a long, indefinite period of time.) John then saw Satan bound, symbolic of Christ's power over Satan's deception so that he can't deceive the nations any longer. This binding lasted for the entire kingdom age, the age of the Church, in which we are now living. The number 1000 is a symbolic number for "completion" so when the "thousand years" come to their end, the plan of God will be brought to completion.

Close to the end of Revelation, John gives a beautiful description of the New Jerusalem, a symbol of God's perfect Church.

The New Jerusalem, the Bride of the Lamb

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. ...The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.... The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night

there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Revelation 21...)

The New Jerusalem's description shows her to be spiritual Israel (built on the 12 Israelite tribes of the Old Testament) and the in grafted Church (New Testament Gentiles led to Christ by the 12 apostles). John stated that only "those who wash their robes" in the blood of Jesus may enter the New Jerusalem, corresponding to the fact that only those who believe in Christ and repent of their sins become members of the Body of Christ.

The New Jerusalem has no temple within it, because the people of God are now the temple, and God lives within them. God and Jesus Christ (the Lamb) are also called the Temple. This indicates that God and His Bride are one in Spirit, joined in a heavenly spiritual marriage.

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?... I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. (1Corinthians 3:16 and Revelation 21:22).

..that all of them may be one, Father, just as You 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. (John 17:21)

The apostle John wrote that when the millennium ends, Satan will be released from his prison and he will go out to deceive the nations to gather them for battle against God's people. John termed these people as the 'camp of the saints' and the 'city that God loves'.

Both terms refer to the New Jerusalem (Old Testament saints and the Church of mostly Gentiles), but there is an indication from the apostle Paul in Romans 11 that the Jews will one day be grafted back into the root of spiritual Israel.

Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!... For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? ... And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ... Israel has

experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved.

This hasn't happened yet, and until it does, it would seem that Satan's agenda to gather up the world forces to attack God's people is still on hold.

However a time is coming when the entire deceived world will 'surround' or besiege God's people. There will be a great spiritual battle that will take place, although the Bible does not tell us the details of what the last battle will look like. However we are told that God will send fire down from heaven to devour the enemies of Christ. Then the devil, who deceived the world, will be thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown before the millennium, where they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. After this comes the Great White Throne Judgment where the dead stand before God, and books are opened, including the Book of Life.

The unsaved dead must wait for the millennium to end before they are judged at the Great White Throne Judgment. After they are judged, death and Hades will be thrown into the lake of fire, which is the second death. Anyone whose name is not found written in the Book of Life will be thrown into the lake of fire.

The rest of the dead did not come back to life until the thousand years were complete. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection! The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with Him for a thousand years.
(Revelation 20:5)

Christians will not be judged as their names are written in the Book of Life. Christians go immediately to be with the Lord after their bodies die, as indicated by the apostle Paul when he said: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better indeed. But it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.(Philippians 1:23)

Christians have already received eternal life, so they go straight to heaven after their physical bodies die, clothed in their new spiritual bodies to enjoy eternity with Jesus forever.

Meanwhile, while we are here on earth, we seek to fulfill the....

GREAT COMMISSION

Christians, living during this long Church era, have been given the task of bringing the gospel of grace to the world, persuading all who will listen to turn from unrighteousness to Christ for salvation.

The task is a great one, as already forces of darkness have been moving mightily on the face of the earth to deceive the multitudes and gather them against God. These demonic forces work through governments and leaders to kill and destroy the nations.

Abortion, wars, disease, sexual perversion, slavery, poverty, oppression of every kind, false religions, violence, etc. are systematically destroying the human race. Many Christians, no matter what end time view they hold, believe that the finalization of all things is at hand because of the increasing evil they see everywhere. Yet even as our hearts cry out for justice, we cannot help but feel pity and compassion for those destroying themselves and others. Christians are the only ones who can bring light to the lost through the message of Jesus Christ, and never in all of history has the need for the gospel been so great. If the Church does not courageously stand for truth and righteousness, the darkness will quickly close in and the end will come. The most important thing we can do to expand God's kingdom and rescue others in His name is to remember who we are in Christ Jesus. Knowing our identity in Christ will instill confidence to speak out even in the midst of persecution.

We live in a new heaven and a new earth with God indwelling us. Through the resurrection of Christ, we have been given power over death and sin. The devil cannot touch us spiritually, neither can he enslave or subjugate us to his will. We are seated with Jesus on His throne, victorious over every obstacle, favored with every spiritual blessing, and called the children of Almighty God! We are the **Jerusalem Bride**, shining with His glory and walking in His light as we gaze adoringly into the face of Jesus Christ, our Savior!

God's will is that we live out this amazing life and bring much glory to His name through sharing our love and faith in Him with the world.

**May Jesus be greatly glorified through His much-beloved Treasure,
His Bride!**

See below for additional notes

Additional Notes on the Grace Gospel

Introduction

The epistles of the Bible reveal the gospel of God's grace which was sweeping Asia in the first century AD, gaining converts in city after city from among both the Jews and the Gentiles. The Christian Church was alive and growing, a vibrant testimony to Jesus Christ and His salvation. However false teachers had crept into the churches and were corrupting the good news, creating confusion and misunderstanding among the believers. These false brethren were mostly from among the Judaizers who asserted that the Christians had to follow the Law of Moses, including the circumcision ritual, in order to be saved. The apostle Paul had to deal strongly with these deceivers, even going so far as to curse them for leading Christians astray. Today a corrupt version of the gospel of Jesus Christ is still being taught in many western churches, with the result that the Church is weak and ineffectual because believers are unaware of their full heritage in Christ. Our world today needs the Church's life-changing message more than ever - the uncorrupted version of the gospel of grace in Christ Jesus. No other gospel has the blessing and anointing of God upon it for it is only His grace that can give the victory to overcome the world, sin, and the devil.

A Corrupt Gospel

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the One who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse! " (Galatians 1:6-9)

Paul's words are as appropriate for today's Church as they were for the Galatians because that same message is still currently being taught in countless Western churches. Many Christians have accepted this 'gospel' and built their

doctrinal understanding of the Scriptures around it. To understand what Paul was talking about, it is helpful to examine his background and the situation in the Galatian church.

At a Christian Council (in Acts 15), a group of Judaizers who were Pharisees insisted that Gentiles could not be saved unless they obeyed the Law of Moses. Paul argued with them and was so convincing that he won the approbation of all the Council members. In his epistle to the Galatians he used the same argument used at the Council, emphasizing the Christian's liberty in Christ and denouncing the perversion of the gospel by the Judaizers. Not that this put an end to the conflict. The Judaizers continued their harassment to the point where the apostle Paul had to become aggressively defiant and forceful. He was so forthright that some might think he hated the Jews, but this was not so, for he was one himself. He belonged to the Pharisees who were religious purists committed to preserving and obeying the Law, and encouraging others to do so too.

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee... (Philippians 3:4-6)

He actually had a high respect for the Jewish heritage, once stating that the Gentiles had much to be thankful for concerning the Jews.

What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God...Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! (Romans 1:3; 9:4,5)

Before becoming a Christian himself, Paul had been so zealous in his religion that he developed an intense hatred for Christians because they taught things contrary to the Jewish religion. He even made it his goal to capture, and then bring Christians to public trial and execution.

His attitude was not unusual among the Jews who were justifiably proud of their history and heritage and opposed any beliefs that ran counter to them. They were particularly proud of the fact that they had been entrusted with the Law of Moses (365 negative commands and 248 positive for a total of 613 commands) which covered every area of the life of Israel. They greatly revered Moses as a leader and prophet because he had received the 10 Commandments, written on stone, directly from God Himself when he was up on Mt. Sinai.

While He had been up there with God, the Israelites had been down at the foot of the mountain anxiously waiting to hear what God would say.

When Moses brought down the 10 Commandments, the people had responded immediately.

"We will do everything," the people answered. (Exodus 24: 3, 7)

Their response indicated their confidence in the flesh to carry out whatever standards God required of them. This self-confidence formed what was to be the Jewish mindset for many centuries, a mindset that viewed the Law of Moses as the sign of God's partiality, giving the Jews a unique identity as a special, privileged people, superior to all other nations.

The Law in the Old Testament was called the Torah, meaning "instruction." It was first written down on Mt. Sinai as an expression of God's moral standards. God gave the Law in order to keep Israel holy and separate from the licentiousness practiced by all the other nations. It was also meant to show the Jew his sin and then guide him to the Ceremonial Law which included a sacrificial system, a Temple, and a tribe of priests. Israel's priests were Levites and only they could make sacrifices for the people. One sacrifice stood out above all the others and was particularly important. On the Day of Atonement, Israel's high priest served at the temple, offering lamb's blood as an offering for sin, which was sprinkled on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant. The animal blood covered over the sins of the people so that God would not judge them. It was a temporary measure that did not actually do away with sin, but it bought the Israelites some time. God promised that one day He would send a Sacrifice that would actually save them from sin. But until that time the High Priest served in the Temple to offer a lamb sacrifice each year on the Day of Atonement. This ritual went on for thousands of years. Paul had been brought up in Jewish tradition and religion and he was well versed in all its doctrines. He had been advancing in Judaism beyond many of his own age, being extremely zealous for the traditions of his forefathers until he had a head-on encounter with Jesus Christ Himself. After that experience, all that went before became completely useless to him. His illustrious ancestral lineage meant little in comparison to what he had found in the Lord. From then on his passion was to preach Christ's gospel wherever he went, whereas before he had persecuted the Christian Church throughout Asia. One of the places he preached in was Galatia and the people had received his gospel eagerly. They had initially accepted his message in all its purity, but now he found that his work was being undone by false teachers. The Galatian believers were now adding works of the Law to the Christian faith, a damnable hybrid that resulted in death rather than life.

Paul targeted the Judaizers as the troublemakers, exposing their motives and

denouncing them as 'people zealous to win you over, but for no good.

What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may have zeal for them.

(Galatians 4:17)

He reminded the Galatian believers that Christ had set them free, but if they let themselves be circumcised, Christ would have no value to them at all. They would be putting themselves under obligation to obey the whole law, and this would alienate them from Christ. In fact Paul put it even more strongly than that. He said they would have fallen away from grace. Then he turned on the Judaizers once more, referring to them as 'leaven' or yeast - a symbol for sin in the Jewish religion. In scathing and unflattering language, Paul warned that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough, meaning that the sinful influence of these false teachers could affect the whole church. Paul ended by angrily exclaiming that he wished the agitators would go the whole way and emasculate themselves! This was meant to be a parody of words regarding the Judaizers' obsession with circumcision that they were pushing on the Christians.

But circumcision wasn't the only thing they advocated for the Christian life. They also maintained that a Christian could only be sanctified (made holy) through obeying the Law. In other words, the Judaizers taught that a Christian had to first be circumcised in order to become a Christian, and then afterwards he would need to strive to keep the Law of commandments in order to keep that salvation. This doctrine has never really disappeared. In fact it is alive and well in many churches today. The Roman Catholic Church, for instance, teaches that baptism and confession are two rituals necessary for salvation.

Afterwards there is a 'second sanctification' that is a lifelong process in which a person already in the state of grace (saved through baptism) grows in holiness by faithfully carrying out works of merit. His failure to acquire sufficient merit results in him going to purgatory (a place of temporal punishment) after death, where he must complete the sanctification process. Many Protestant churches would disagree that anyone is saved by works or religious ritual, insisting that only faith in Christ is required for salvation. However they would agree with the Catholics that the Christian is required to keep the Law in order to be sanctified (made holy).

Some Protestant denominations teach that failure to become holy through keeping the Law can result in ultimate loss of salvation. This is not unlike the corrupted gospel Paul was refuting in his letter to the church in Galatia. Here are some of his own words:

Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be

circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh. May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything;

what counts is the new creation.... I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? ...For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith. "The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, "The person who does these things will live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole." (Galatians 3:2-5; 10-13)

Impossible Struggle

Paul saw the light (figuratively as well as literally - Jesus appeared to him in a blinding light) but the Jews were loath to give up their religion with its laws, traditions and ceremonies, even though not one Jew had ever been able to keep the Law perfectly. Jewish history is replete with instances of their countless failures. Although God had always been faithful to them, delivering them from slavery in Egypt, guiding them as a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, splitting a rock to provide water, and making food fall from the sky, the Jews were unable to remain loyal to God in return. Time and again they turned away from God and took up the idols of neighboring pagan nations.

Psalm 78 states:^[1]^[2]^[3]"They rebelled against the high God, they did not follow orders, they were like their ancestors - treacherous and disloyal and they angered God with their idols...God was angry; He completely rejected Israel. "

Even the Levitical line of priests transgressed against God.^[1]^[2]^[3]"And now, you priests, this warning is for you. You do not hear, you do not resolve to honor my name, and God Almighty says, "I will send a curse upon you. Yes, I have cursed them already. " (Malachi 2: 1-2)

Admittedly, remaining true to God was not easy, even for those who wanted to be obedient to Him. Paul, the apostle, gave a perfect example of his own impossible struggle to obey the Commandments while he was under the Law. He stated that the Law had served him well as far as making him aware of sin. If it hadn't been for the

command 'You shall not covet' he would never have known that coveting was wrong. However after learning the Law's prohibition against coveting, he found that the sin of covetousness increased to the point where he experienced every kind of coveting imaginable. It killed him spiritually.

Prior to his awareness of this law, he had felt no guilt or condemnation but now he felt like a wretched slave to sin. He didn't know what to do about it. It seemed as though it wasn't even him doing the sinning but rather a sin principle operating through his body. He realized he had a sinful nature that prevented him from going the right way.

So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? -, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. (Romans 7:21-25)

Many years later, there was a man named Martin Luther from Germany who belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. He thought of becoming a lawyer but his fears of hell and God's wrath caused him to join a monastery in order to find salvation.

However he soon became very disillusioned and discouraged by the immorality and corruption among the Catholic priests. Meanwhile he was constantly plagued by guilt, to the point where he practiced self-flagellation with a whip until he bled. Once he did penance by laying on the ground in the snow on a winter's night until he almost froze to death. Then one day, while preparing lectures, Luther read the first line of Psalm 22, where the Messiah cries out for mercy on the cross. It resonated with Luther who often felt a similar desperation in his own relationship with God.

Two years later, while studying Paul's Epistle to the Romans, he read, "The just will live by faith." He thought about this verse for a time until one day he realized the key to spiritual salvation was not enslavement to the Law but rather to believe that faith alone would bring salvation. He realized that up to that time, he had been influenced by a false gospel that had hidden the truth from him.

Others have been deceived by such a gospel as well. Mother Teresa once confessed: "People often say that God loves me, but I feel cold and empty inside. Where is the love, faith, trust, and prayer? Maybe I should not be with the Sacred Heart." Mother Teresa helped people for forty years, but she had a hard time finding meaning in life and she did not feel as close to God as she wanted. Her Catholic training had kept her enslaved to a gospel that offered no peace or freedom. The apostle Paul, Martin Luther, and Mother Teresa all struggled in their faith. As they tried to get closer to God, they felt a sense of failure. They asked themselves, "How much is enough? When does it end?"

Why is God still not satisfied?" They were not happy in their Christianity, just as many Christians today are depressed and unhappy as they struggle in their walk with God. In many cases this is because the gospel they heard was a corrupt distortion of the true message of salvation.

But why all this sin consciousness in the first place? Why do people feel such a separation from God that they feel discouraged, even to the point of self-hatred? Why do they beat themselves up, like Martin Luther did? Why do they feel like they can never do enough for God, like Mother Theresa? The answer goes back to the very beginning of time when God created the Garden of Eden and put man and woman in it. We all know the story. Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree of knowledge of good and evil, and that was the first sin. From then on there was a rift between God and humanity. This separation continued on through millennia with sin being passed on to successive generations. Even though the descendants of Adam did not sin in the exact same way as Adam, they were born in Adam's image and all inherited his sinful disposition. What's worse, all of humanity died spiritually because of that one sin. We were all made sinners from the sin of Adam.

The Scriptures put it this way:

...people have no excuse for what they do.. Ever since the world was created it has been possible to see the qualities of God that are not seen..... They knew God but they didn't honor him as God. They didn't thank him. Their thinking became worthless. Their foolish hearts became dark. They claimed to be wise, but they made fools of themselves. They would rather have statues of gods than the glorious God who lives forever. ... So God let them go. He allowed them to do what their sinful hearts wanted to. ...They are full of every kind of sin, evil and ungodliness. They want more than they need. They commit murder. They want what belongs to other people. They fight and cheat. They hate God. .. They can't be trusted. They are not loving and kind. They know that God's commands are right and that those who do evil things should die. But they continue to do those very things...Everyone is under the power of sin. "No one is right with God, no one at all.... They have all become worthless. No one does anything good, no one at all." --They do not know how to live in peace." ..."They don't have any respect for God." (Romans 1:20-32)

In spite of this damning description of fallen humanity, God loved his human creation and He made an agreement, called a covenant that made a way for Him to reunite with His people. The first covenant He made was the Abrahamic Covenant (a faith covenant; the Old Law Covenant came later) and it was in effect for thousands of years. This covenant was based on faith and loyalty to God for without faith it is impossible to please God. Many of the Old Testament believers entered into this faith covenant with God. Abel had faith when he brought God a better offering than Cain. Enoch had faith and was taken from the earth without

dying. Noah had faith and built an ark to save his family. Abraham had faith.

God called him to go to a place he would later receive as his own and he went even though he didn't know where he was going.

Sarah had faith and God made it possible for her to become a mother even though she was too old to have children. Abraham was past the time when he could have children, but many children came from him. They were as many as the stars in the sky. All these people were still living by faith when they died. They didn't receive the things God had promised. There were also others - Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets. All these people were praised because they had faith, but none of them received what God had promised in the covenant. That's because God had planned something better for us, so they would only be made perfect together with us.

"These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what they were promised. They would not be made right with God before us." (Hebrews 11)

Such dedication and commitment, yet they did not receive what they were promised, until we Christians came on the scene.

The Priesthood

When Jesus arrived, He brought many changes that were very different from the way things had been done under the Old Covenant. One of those changes involved the Levitical priest system. God's law said a man from the tribe of Levi was to be the high priest for Israel. It was forbidden for any non-Levite to serve in the Tabernacle (and later on in the Temple). The rules about this were very strict. This would have disqualified Jesus from being High Priest in the Jewish Temple because He was from the tribe of Judah. No one had ever served as a priest from the tribe of Judah. The law did not allow it.

He belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe ever served at the altar. (Hebrews 7:13 - 14).

Yet the Bible clearly states that Jesus is indeed our High Priest.

Unlike the other high priests, (Jesus) does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever. (Hebrews 7:27-28)

Since Jesus is now our High Priest, but not from the tribe of Levi, what kind of priesthood does He belong to? The answer is suggested in a rather mysterious scripture passage found in Genesis.

Then Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. (Genesis 14:18-20)

Melchizedek means 'king of righteousness'. This king was from Salem (Jerusalem) and he was said to be 'without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life,' making him a very mysterious figure indeed. Melchizedek met Abraham after Abraham's defeat of 3 kings who had kidnapped the people of Sodom, including Abraham's nephew Lot and his family. Melchizedek presented bread and wine to Abraham in friendship, and he blessed Abraham in the name of God Most High. (Genesis 14: 18-20). Abraham then presented Melchizedek with a tenth of all the items he had gathered from battle. In Psalm 110, David wrote concerning the Messiah: **The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."** thereby identifying Melchizedek as a type of Christ. The superiority of Melchizedek's order over the Levitical priesthood (represented in Abraham and his ancestors) was shown when Abraham gave the tithe to Melchizedek - lower order deferring to the higher. This act showed that Abraham recognized Melchizedek as being of a higher rank than he. Because Jesus is of the Melchizedek priestly order, this indicates that Christ's new priesthood is superior to the old Levitical order and the priesthood of Aaron.

Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, from their fellow Israelites—even though they also are descended from Abraham. This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. And without doubt the lesser is blessed by the greater. In the one case, the tenth is collected by people who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the 'loins' of his ancestor. (Hebrews 7:4-10).

Many Christians believe that Melchizedek was actually a pre-incarnate figure of

Christ (Christophany). The fact that Melchizedek was without beginning of days or end of life, like Christ, makes this a distinct possibility.

The Covenant

Since Jesus is our High Priest today, it means that the priesthood changed. Consequently the law system must have changed at some point as well. Actually, that's exactly what happened. The entire system changed! When Christians claim that the Law is still for us today but also claim Jesus as their Savior (High Priest), they are being highly inconsistent. Under the Law with its Levitical priest system, Jesus could not be the High Priest. Only a Levite could be a High Priest under the Law. The Law belongs to the old system but Jesus is from the new system. He is a High Priest, but under a different system. For this reason, the writer of Hebrews writes: **“When the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also”** (Hebrews 7:12)

Galatians 6:2 states, **“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ”**. The New Law was explained by Jesus in **Mark 12:28–31**.

“Which commandment is the most important of all?” Jesus answered, **“The most important is, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”** The second is this: **“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** **There is no other commandment greater than these.”**

In other words, Christ's Law is to love God, and to love others as we love ourselves. Best of all, this New Law fits in perfectly with the New Covenant. The Old Law Covenant had to change because it wasn't working.

If it had been sufficient, there would have been no need to change it, but God found fault with the people who could not keep it.

“The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. (Hebrews 8:7-10)

A new covenant? Some people have gone to church for years and have never even

heard of the new covenant. But if we want to understand how to relate to God, we need to understand this new agreement He made with humanity.

God said that He was setting aside the first covenant and 'By calling this covenant new, (He) has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will disappear. '(Hebrews 8:13)

Something new was coming, something completely different that God had always intended to bring, and it would make the first agreement null and void.

The book of Hebrews describes it in this way:

The first covenant had rules for worship. It also had a sacred tent on earth. A holy tent was set up. The lamp-stand was in the first room. So was the table with its holy bread. That was called the Holy Room. Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Room. It had the golden altar for incense. It also had the wooden chest called the Ark of the Covenant. The ark was covered with gold. It held the gold jar of manna.

It held Aaron's walking stick that had budded. It also held the stone tablets. The words of the covenant were written on them...That's how everything was arranged in the holy tent. The priests entered it at regular times. They went into the outer room to do their work for God and others, but only the high priest went into the inner room.

He went in only once a year. He never entered without taking blood with him. He offered the blood for himself. He also offered it for the sins the people had committed because they didn't know any better. The animal blood sacrifices were essential because "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." (Hebrews 9:22)

The Sacrifice

As long as the Tabernacle (and later the Temple) was still standing, the way into the Holy of Holies was restricted to everyone but the Levitical high priest, and even he could only enter once a year.

But Christ came to be the high priest... He entered the Most Holy Room by spilling his own blood. He did it once and for all time. In this way, he paid the price to set us free from sin forever. The blood of goats and bulls is sprinkled on people that the law called "unclean. The people are sprinkled to make them holy. That makes them "clean" on the outside. But Christ offered himself to God

without any flaw... through the power of the eternal Holy Spirit.....He did not enter a sacred tent made with human hands. That tent was only a copy of the true one. He entered heaven itself. He did it to stand in front of God for us.

He is there right now. The high priest enters the Most Holy Room every year. He enters with blood that is not his own. But Christ did not enter heaven to offer himself again and again. If he had, he would have had to suffer many times since the world was created. But he has appeared once and for all time. He has come at the time when God's work is being completed. He has come to do away with sin by offering himself. .. Christ was offered up once. He took away the sins of many people. ...The law was only a shadow of the good things that were coming. It is not the real things themselves. ... It isn't possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. So when Christ came into the world, he said, "You didn't want sacrifices and offerings. Instead, you prepared a body for me...

I have come to do what you want, my God.' ... Jesus our priest offered one sacrifice for sins for all time. Then he sat down at the right hand of God. And since that time, he waits for his enemies to be put under his control. By that one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy....Then he adds, "I will not remember their sins anymore. I will not remember the evil things they have done." Where these sins have been forgiven, an offering for sin is no longer necessary. (Hebrews 10)

Not only is no other offering for sin necessary, but the Temple isn't required anymore either. Jesus sat down at the right hand of God to show that His work was finished. That was what he meant when he cried out on the cross "It is finished!"

The Law

Just as the Old Covenant was replaced by the New, including the priesthood, our relationship to the Law was also changed.

The law of God given to Moses was a detailed set of rules prescribed to restrict the Israelites' behavior as God's chosen people. It was to have a sanctifying effect on the Israelites, protecting them from the sinful influences of the neighboring pagan nations. The moral law encompassed rules about justice, sexual conduct, and included the Ten Commandments.

The ceremonial laws focused on sacrifices and other ceremonies regarding uncleanness, as well as feasts and festivals, dietary and clothing restrictions, Sabbath, circumcision, Passover, and the redemption of the firstborn. These laws

were specifically given for the Israelites and they were designed to benefit them. Paul wrote to Timothy that when used appropriately, the Law is good.

[1][SEP]"We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. ..We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers...(1 Timothy 1: 8-11)

The Bible says that the world is silenced by the law, which gives no excuse for sin and makes absolute demands for justice and righteousness.[1][SEP]

"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. So nobody will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; Rather, through the law we become conscious of sin". (Romans 3: 19-20)

Even the Jews did not understand how the Law worked. Jesus had to remind them how stringent the standards really were.

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'idiot,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.... ..It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery... if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins....Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5 and 6)

These teachings must have cast a heavy shadow on the disciples and followers of Jesus. Such impossibly high standards emphasized the wide gulf between a holy God and sinful humanity. Jesus was preaching on the Law, which is not meant to comfort and encourage people into a lax relationship with the Almighty. The Law of Moses points out our human shortcomings and piles on judgment and condemnation so that we recognize our sinfulness. This is the legitimate and beneficial effect of the Law.

The desperation that Martin Luther experienced in the monastery was exactly the correct response to the Law. For him, and for anyone else living under the Law, the experience is like being a slave to a taskmaster. Even the strictest legalist is exposed by

the Law which condemns him as soon as he commits a single sin.

Being under the law is like being in prison. You're always being reminded that you are guilty. The law does not help us. It tears down our pride and shows us that we will never succeed. The law shows us that we are spiritually dead and we need new life. Yet many people attempt to avoid the Law's condemnation by telling themselves that God doesn't really expect perfection (although Jesus clearly indicated that He does). "Nobody's perfect" is the mantra many of us stick on our car bumpers and spout as a truism to our neighbors. The idea that God expects more of our behavior than what is humanly possible is seen as unreasonable and extreme. Yet the law makes an all or nothing demand. Either we obey the whole law, or we are cursed. There is no other option.

James teaches, "Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." (James 2:10)

'Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you are circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you. Every man who lets himself be circumcised must obey the whole law.'
(Galatians 5: 2-3)

The Law demands perfection and complete obedience of EVERY command. Of course, no one can meet that standard, which is why Paul called the Law a ministry of condemnation. He said that the Law kills because it puts everyone under a sentence of death for breaking its commands.

Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. (2 Corinthians 3:7-9)

Paul is referring to the Ten Commandments because he particularly mentioned that the ministry "was engraved in letters on stone." This was true of the commandments. These commandments have the effect of arousing sin.

"We live under the law, sin will rule over us. We are free from the law, sin shall not rule over us: "Sin will no longer be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14).

This idea is shocking to many Christians.

They agree that salvation does not come through the Law but rather through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, yet they wonder how they can possibly live holy lives if the

Ten Commandments do not guide them. It is an obvious question and Paul gave the answer.

Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.

But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

(Romans 7:4-6)

Those who are led by the Spirit are not under the Law of the Old Covenant. The Law is a poor substitute for the advice of the Holy Spirit. We think that it is a good way to live to follow the Ten Commandments, but the Law actually causes us to increase sinning. Principles, rules, and standards, no matter how "Christian" we believe them to be, cannot make us holy. In fact, they bring spiritual death! Being led by God Himself is much better.

"Since you died with Christ we are not subject to the rules of the world: the rule that says" Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch! "These rules will be destroyed. They are based on human commands and teachings. Such knowledge seems like a good rule, but they lack any value in preventing sin." (Colossians 2:20 - 23)

Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by human effort? (Galatians 3: 2-3)

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. (Colossians 2:13-14)

Paul was deeply disappointed with the Galatian Christians who had started out with the Holy Spirit, but then returned to the Old Testament Law. He was flabbergasted that they were trying to continue their walk with God by employing human effort! Many today are trying the exact same thing. They are like the Galatians who looked back to the Law and mixed it with the grace of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul said this was no gospel (good news) at all. In fact it was really a sinful hybrid that was stumbling the believers and robbing them of joy and freedom in Christ. Christians should not be slaves to the law. Jesus Christ has already met the requirements of the Law and He has credited the requirements of the law to those who are born of the Spirit:

'God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful humanity to be a sin offering. God condemned sin in the human body. The law of commands is fully met in Jesus Christ'....

"So, my brothers and sisters, you have died to the law so that you may belong to another, to Him who was raised from the dead. We have been released from the law to a new way of the Spirit so that we do not serve in the old way of the written code.(Romans 7: 4, 6; 8: 3-4)

It's important to understand that the Law has absolutely no value as concerns making us holy. It cannot stop us from sinning.

Some people still follow the basic spiritual powers of the world. ... Here are the rules you follow. "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!" Rules like these are about things that will pass away soon. They are based on merely human rules and teachings....But rules like these don't help. They don't stop people from chasing after sinful pleasures.... The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God. (Colossians 2:20-23; Hebrews 7:18-19)

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. (Romans 3:20-22)

But God Says

The Bible can be confusing to Christians because it seems to give two conflicting messages where grace and Law are concerned. It clearly states that the New Covenant has brought changes in the priesthood and sacrifice, and it also says that Christians are not under the Law anymore. But then why did Jesus Himself preach the Law to His followers telling them they had to be perfect in order to be accepted by God? Why were His teachings sometimes so Law-based?

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. For I tell you truly, until heaven and earth pass away, not a single jot, not a stroke of a pen, will disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. "(Matthew5:18)

The above scripture states that not even the smallest markings of the Hebrew

script would pass away from the Law until it was completely fulfilled. This would include the Sabbath, sacrifices in the Temple, circumcision, tithing, purification rituals, etc.

Throughout the New Testament we read that Christ's sacrificial death has indeed fulfilled these requirements of the Law and completely set aside the legal code.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, (Ephesians 2:14-15)

To understand these conflicting passages, it is important to see the dividing line in history between the Old and New Covenants.

Peter, James, John, and Paul all wrote about life under the new system. However many of the teachings of Jesus dealt with the Old Covenant. We often forget that Jesus was born as a Jew under the old system and His mission was to lead His people out of the old way into the new.

"But when the time came, God's Son, born under law, came to redeem those under law, that we might receive sonship." (Galatians 4: 4-5)

The Jews trusted in works of the Law for salvation and Jesus was guiding the people to trust in Him instead the Mosaic Law system. But He had to start where they were at. The first thing He did was bring them into an understanding that the old system could never bring eternal life. When Jesus first came to the Jews, they didn't understand that the Law could not make them spiritually alive, or that they could never attain life that way. Jesus used shock tactics to get their attention.

"The law says that whoever murders will be judged. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be judged. " (Matthew 5: 21-22)

"The law says you shall not commit adultery. But I tell you, anyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery in his heart."(Matthew 5: 27-28)

If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away.

It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell." (Matthew 5:29-30).

Jesus used extreme examples to emphasize to His followers that this is what you have

to do if you hope to keep the Law in order to escape hell. The Law condemned adultery, but Jesus took it a step farther saying that just to look at a woman with lust was the same as adultery, and this was enough to damn you to eternal perdition. Jesus said it was better to gouge out your eyes so that you couldn't see a woman to lust after her. Of course Jesus wasn't telling people to actually gouge out their eyes. He was showing how serious it was to break the Law. He was showing that every sin, even if it is just in thought, condemns people to hell. Jesus was hoping that the Jews would give up trying to save themselves through the works of the Law. He wanted the people to see that they could never keep the Law, just as the Israelites in the Old Testament could never keep it. He wanted them to see their danger and to become desperate for a different way to be saved. Then He told them that He was bringing a new way to them.

One day Jesus told a story of a rich young man. The man was very zealous for the Law of God and had tried his best to keep it. Jesus looked at him and loved him because he saw that his heart was sincere and earnest.

The young man said: "Since I was a boy, I have kept all these rules."

Obviously the young zealot did not completely understand his own heart or the true nature of the Law. Jesus gently tried to enlighten him.

One thing you lack," he said. "Sell everything. Give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven." The man's face fell. He was rich, he went away sorrowful. (Mark 10:20 – 22)

The young Law-keeper saw at once that he had not obeyed the Law completely because he coveted his wealth and could not give it up. The apostle Paul had the same experience.

I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. (Romans 7: 7-10)

The young legalist had undoubtedly read the tenth commandment many times but had never applied it correctly to himself. Jesus, with a few direct words, made him aware that he was a sinner who, like everyone else, could not keep the Law perfectly. Jesus' instruction to sell all his belongings was meant to help the young man see into his own heart. The Lord didn't intend to let His followers deceive themselves concerning their performance under the Law. His intention was to make them very uncomfortable so

that they would recognize their need for a Savior. His assertion that not even the smallest markings of the Hebrew script would pass away from the Law until it was completely fulfilled was meant to point to Himself as that Savior, for it was He who fulfilled every component of the Law.

On the cross, just before releasing His spirit to the Father, Jesus cried out, "**It is finished!**" indicating that every part of the Law had been fulfilled. From then on, the Law was no longer to function as a guardian over the people of God.

So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (Galatians 3:24-27)

Paul wrote that Christians have been made right with God through faith and they were to continue to live by faith. They were not to return to the Law. They were to follow the Holy Spirit who had been given to them after they trusted in Christ. The Holy Spirit had nothing to do with the law.

"You are led by the Spirit, you are not under law." (Galatians 5:18)

These scriptures plainly state that the Law has no place in the life of faith. Grace (faith) operates in an entirely different way than the Law operates. The Law condemns, coerces, and threatens us to submit to its statutes, but grace motivates us to willingly say "no" to sin. It teaches, guides, and leads us to live holy lives.

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. (Titus 2: 11-12)

Since we are saved by grace through faith, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit brings about purity and that is more than enough. The grace of the Holy Spirit teaches us every day. We do not need laws to keep us under control.

Grace alone is the cure for sin!

**"My grace is sufficient for you, my strength is made perfect in weakness."
(2 Corinthians 12: 9)**

Note: One portion of Matthew 5:18 is very troubling for Christians because it implies that the Law will be in effect until the end of time.

"For I tell you truly, until heaven and earth pass away, not a single jot, not a stroke of a pen, will disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."

This verse is used by those who argue that the Law of Moses is still in effect for everyone, including Christians today.

However this would be a flat contradiction of all the other scriptures that say the Law of Moses does not have authority over the Christian. And Jesus made it clear that He wasn't about to fulfill only a part of the law. He would fulfill ALL the Law - moral and ceremonial - and not just the part that had to do with animal sacrifices and purification rituals.

Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in THE LAW OF MOSES AND THE PROPHETS AND THE PSALMS concerning Me." (Luke 24:44)

To fulfill the Law means to complete it; to end it. Jesus released us from the Law of Moses by fulfilling it. So what did Jesus mean about the Law remaining until heaven and earth pass away if He has already fulfilled it?

When it comes right down to it, it all depends on how we interpret "heaven and earth" in this passage. A literal interpretation of a physical heaven and earth would mean that the Old Covenant Law is still in effect until the earth is no more. Since it cannot mean that, the language must be figurative. The Bible often uses figurative language to describe cataclysmic happenings.

When describing the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus said in Luke 21:22 that the disciples were already in the "days of vengeance in which all things that are written must be fulfilled." He told them plainly that their "generation (would) not pass away until all things take place."

Then Jesus added that "heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words will by no means pass away." Both Luke 21 and Matthew 5:17-18 refer to the passing of heaven and earth and the fulfillment of all prophesy.

These were references to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

In Isaiah 13:1-13, a prophecy was given against the nation of Babylon.

"Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place."

The language makes it sound like a worldwide destruction was going to happen, but it was referring to Babylon's destruction in 539 BC. When the Medes destroyed Babylon (Isaiah 13:17), the Babylonian world came to an end. The physical heaven and earth did not end, but for Babylon they had collapsed. This is apocalyptic language which is obviously figurative.

In Isaiah 34:3-5, there is a description of the fall of Edom described in similar language "...and **the mountains shall be melted** with their blood. And all the host of **heaven shall be dissolved**, and the **heavens shall be rolled together** as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down...

For my sword shall be **bathed in heaven**: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment."

This language was meant to describe Edom's fall as a nation, not the end of the world.

What Jesus was saying in Matthew 5:17-18 was that the Law would not end until all prophecy had been fulfilled concerning the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the Old Covenant age. That was when the Temple would be destroyed, just as Jesus had foretold. The Temple represented the Old Covenant age (and the Law was associated with it). This occurred in 70 AD, while Jesus' disciples were still around to see it, just as He said they would be.

What About The Sabbath?

Once we, as Christians, know that we are under grace and not under the Law, certain legal traditions become suspect. We wonder how such things as Sunday worship and tithing fit into this new life of grace. Weekly Sabbath observance and tithing are rooted in the Law. If we impose these on believers today, we are implying that believers should follow the Law, and that means all of it because the Law is an all-or-nothing system. It cannot be applied in one part and not another.

For Jews, the Sabbath, the seventh day of creation, was a reminder of God resting after His work. God commanded Israel to remember the Sabbath day and to use it for rest. It was to be a special day of remembering how God rested after six days of working on His glorious creation. As part of the Law, the Sabbath had to be fulfilled by Jesus. The Bible states plainly that Jesus is God's true Sabbath rest. This is another way of saying that Jesus is our salvation from the works of the Law.

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; those who enter into God's rest also rest from their own works, as God did from his. We, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest. (Hebrews 4: 9-11)

The Sabbath was only a shadow. It foreshadowed the coming of a Rest that would free humanity from striving to keep the Law. Every Christian now lives within this Rest - within Jesus Christ - and is consequently at peace with God and free from all the

pressures he once experienced under the Law.

What About Tithing?

Concerning tithing, many people think that Christians should give 10 percent of their income to the church or they are "robbing God." (They justify this view by referring to an Old Testament scripture -Malachi 3:8). Some pastors are especially concerned that this part of the Old Covenant remain in effect in order to keep the churches' finances solvent, but as mentioned earlier, this would mean making the entire Law applicable to believers for to be under one law is to be under the whole. More ominously, it would put the pastor under the curse of Paul for preaching a mixture of Law and grace.

At one time the tithe was necessary. After Israel conquered Canaan, the tribes divided the land, but the tribe of Levi did not get land because they were to be priests for the Tabernacle. As priests they could not have homes or land but rather received support from the other tribes. The law commanded that they get 10%. That was the reason for the tithe. However today, if a pastor of the Church teaches that Christians should tithe 10 percent to the church, it is teaching Law. God says Christians should give offerings from a happy heart and not under compulsion (law). Believers are free to give 1 percent, 10 percent, or 100 percent.

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9: 7).

What About Confession?

Confession is practiced in many Churches because of 1John 1:9 in the New Testament.

"If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"?

Traditionally the verse has been understood to mean that God's salvation is dependent on the confession of our sins. This is the way the Roman Catholic Church interprets this passage. Many Protestant churches do not go as far as saying that confession is necessary for salvation, but they do hold that fellowship with God is dependent on it. Consequently this verse has caused many Christians to feel uncomfortable with the Lord, fearing they have incurred His displeasure by forgetting to confess ALL their sins

to Him. This interpretation of the scripture also places God in the role of legal Examiner, thus hindering the Christian's relationship with God as a loving Father.

1John1:9 is actually not even speaking to true believers. It is addressing some people in the Church who professed to be Christians but who proclaimed that they had never sinned. They were from the Gnostic sect. Gnosticism was actually opposed to Christianity because of its false teaching that anything done in the body, even the grossest sin, didn't matter, because real life exists in the spirit realm only. Gnostics thought they were superior because they had a deeper, secret knowledge of God, which they said was necessary for salvation. Although they claimed to follow Jesus and His teachings, the Gnostics contradicted Him at every turn. These are the ones John was addressing, telling them that they needed to admit (confess) that they were sinners so that they could be saved. Unless the Gnostics agreed that they needed to be forgiven for sins committed in the body, they were not saved.

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1John 1:8).

Everyone who wishes to become a believer in Christ must admit that he is a sinner. Someone who claims he has never sinned is not a Christian. So here John is concerned for unbelievers who claimed to be Christians but were not. He firmly stated that saying we have never sinned makes us liars who don't have Christ. Such people are not real Christians, but rather they are wolves trying to look like Jesus' sheep. Another scripture that troubles Christians is James 5:16 which seems to make God's healing dependent on confession.

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

The apostle James is saying that we are to confess our sins to each other so that others can pray for us. Prayer for healing is a normal part of the church. James' exhortation to confess our sins to one another is not meant as a conditional requirement for God's forgiving or cleansing us. Confessing sin does not bring cleansing into a Christian's life. We've already been cleansed “once for all” through the onetime blood sacrifice. Our fellowship with God cannot be broken. When we sin, Jesus' Spirit is there to help us learn from our mistake. However, being sorry for sin is normal for Christians. Being sorry for sin leads a believer to desire change because we are designed for good works, not sins. We're meant to display the life of Jesus Christ.

What About Prayer?

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught his disciples to say, "Forgive us our sins" (Luke 11:4) which is asking for God's forgiveness.

This raises the question of how this fits in with once-for-all forgiveness in Christ? There is also the scripture that seems to make God's forgiveness of our sins dependent on our own forgiveness of others.

"If you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your sins, your Father will not forgive you." (Matthew 6:14-15)

Jesus prayed, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12).

Why would Jesus say this about earning forgiveness through forgiving others? Again, we must remember that Jesus often spoke to the Jews as under the Law. That is exactly the case in these passages where He was showing that under the Old Covenant God's standards were incredibly high and His forgiveness was conditional on human behavior. Of course no one can forgive others perfectly. The Lord's Prayer is actually an Old Covenant prayer. When Jesus taught Jews how to pray, His blood had not yet been shed and the New Covenant had not begun. Later, through Jesus Christ's sacrifice, God provided a way to forgiveness that does not involve trying to keep impossible standards. Through this sacrifice, God has made us perfect in His sight and He has declared us 'not guilty'. The book of Hebrews tells us that God doesn't remember our sins anymore.

For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.
(Hebrews 8:12)

Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." (Hebrews 10:17).

God has declared that He keeps no record of our wrongs. We can't begin to pay him back. He has released us from what we owe Him and our forgiveness rests solely on what was accomplished at Calvary. This is the amazing forgiveness that God *chose* for us through the finished work of his Son. Knowing that we are forgiven completely is important because it enables us to more easily forgive others. We see others as God

sees them. We focus on our newness and Christ's presence within us and then our behaviour changes.

"As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone.

Forgive as the Lord forgave you.' (Colossians 3: 12-14)

Changed on the Inside

When we place our faith in Christ's work, things happen on the inside of us that are monumental, although they are unseen on the outside. At the moment of regeneration, the Holy Spirit enters our human spirit and effects a life-changing transformation. Positionally we move out of the line of Adam's life (who brought us into spiritual death through his sin) and into the life of Christ (who brought us eternal life through His death and resurrection). We become part of a new family. At the deepest level, we are a changed person - an ALIVE person. Now we are in Christ and He is in us.

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3: 3).

The place we are in now is completely different from where we were before. Our new spiritual condition lifted us out of a dark realm and translated us into the kingdom of light. The Bible states that as sinners we were like Adam, but through our new position in Christ, we become saints with a nature like Christ's. We are spiritually alive and righteous.

"He delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his dear Son." (Colossians 1:13)

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us **alive** with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:4-5)

This transferal is so astounding that it can be hard for the human mind to grasp. We can understand that Jesus Christ was crucified and buried, but do we realize that we were also spiritually crucified and buried with Him? Do we comprehend that as we entered into Christ's salvation, our old self was done away with?

"We were baptized into Christ ... our old self was crucified with him, we are buried with

him through baptism". (Romans 6: 3-4, 6)

(The old self is also called the "old man" in Adam. Adam represents all of sinful mankind with a nature that is spiritually dead.) For a short time, Jesus Christ was on earth like one of us.

He was in the likeness of sinful flesh, although He never sinned and didn't have the dead sin nature of Adam. The curse of death did not apply to Him but Jesus willingly volunteered to represent sinful mankind, becoming a second Representative of humanity - the Second Adam. Being human was essential if the Second Adam was to take on Himself the penalty for sin. And being sinless was essential if the Second Adam was to escape death and resurrect into new life. This is what Jesus did for us. He became the New Creation, a new humanity that had never existed before. The entrance into this New Creation happens the moment we trust Jesus as our Redeemer. When that happens, we are reborn to become new creatures with His life and nature formed within us. Those who do not accept Jesus as their Savior remain in the old humanity (old man in Adam) and are eternally separated from God.

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:3- 4)

Today Jesus is sitting in heaven with God, and so are we! We are joined to Him!
We are joined to the risen Christ and we are declared totally righteous in Him.

God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2: 7).

What a marvelous revelation! Seated with Christ in the heavenlies; in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit who is our Counselor, Helper, Comforter, and Advocate; and made clean and perfect through the sacrifice of Christ without one sin to condemn us.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1)

As if that isn't enough, we also have the Holy Spirit praying for us (Romans 8:26) and assuring us that we are God's children. (Romans 8:16). He also trains and teaches us, and when we sin, He reminds us of Jesus' work on the cross by which we were made pure for good deeds.

Unfortunately we still have an enemy - Satan - who tries to tempt us. What many Christians cannot understand is why this is even possible if the old nature is gone? Why do Christians still sin? When reading Romans 7: 14-20, which was Paul's experience under the Law, some believers assume that this scripture applies to them. They think that they must have two natures, a good one and a bad one, because Paul's struggle seems so similar to their own, and he seemed to imply there was an evil force foreign to himself doing the sinning. They believe that they must struggle with their sinful nature and that it is a natural thing for them to sin.

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. (Romans 7:14-20)

Paul, as a Jew under the Law, was delineating between the desires of his conscience and the sinful tendency inside him that was always at war within him. He said it felt like there was an evil force fighting against his heart. He loved his Jewish religion and he loved the Law. He wanted to be obedient to God and to live righteously, but this force kept causing him to fall into sin. Paul was controlled by his sin nature which dominated his flesh. In Romans 8:13 Paul stated that if we live according to the flesh, we will die; but if by the Spirit we put to death the misdeeds of the body, we will live. However Paul did not have the Holy Spirit while he was still under the Law, so he had no power over sin. This is what this scripture is emphasizing - that the Law gives no power over sin.

Yet Paul was still able to do some good things, meaning he could still perform some commendable deeds in response to his conscience (the Law written on everyone's heart). Unfortunately these good deeds, if not motivated by faith in a believing heart, are of no eternal value and still constitute living in the flesh. The flesh also desires to be religious and pious, as were the Pharisees who opposed Jesus, and this was certainly true of Paul as well. Poor Paul was so desperate about his situation that he cried out: **What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?** Then he gives the answer: **Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!"** (Romans 7:24)

Of course even though Christians have the Holy Spirit, and therefore power over sin, they do sometimes sin, causing a struggle within that robs them of joy and confidence in the Lord.

That is why this scripture about Paul's struggle under the Law sounds so familiar to believers. But this struggle is not because we have two natures, as though we are spiritually schizophrenic now that we have become believers in Christ. Christians have only one nature.

'He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.' (2 Peter 1:4)

We are now partakers of God's divine nature but we still struggle against the flesh (body of sin). Remember, this is not the same as the old sin nature.

That was done away with through the sacrifice of Christ. The old nature is the essence of a person cut off from God - an unbeliever. Christians no longer belong to the old humanity that is doomed. We have been lifted out of that realm entirely. The sin nature of the old man is not ours anymore.

However we still have what is called the 'flesh'. It is important to understand that there is a difference between the terms "flesh" and "sinful nature" in the Bible. The flesh (body) is from the earth. It is where we get a sense of who we are - how smart we are, the way we look, our status. The flesh includes our body, reason, and all other faculties, and these, together with our spirit, comprise the soul.

The soul and the spirit are connected, but separate (Hebrews 4:12), the soul being the essence of our being and the spirit being what connects us with God. In unbelievers, the soul is imperishable but the spirit is dead towards God. Unbelievers have no connection with God spiritually. In Christians the soul has a new spirit which is characterized by the divine nature and this allows it to link spiritually with God. This new creation spirit is now our identity. It's who we are - saints of the most High God.

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

Christians are to live from their spirit so that communion with God is intimate and perpetual. The spirit is to have the preeminence in influencing the mind to think true thoughts and the emotions to respond accordingly. In other words, the reborn spirit is to be boss over the soul.

Unfortunately Christians sometimes slip back into old patterns and habits that were operative when they were unbelievers. These remnants from the old man still influence some of our thinking and emotions. These, along with the lusts still stirring within our bodies, make up the flesh. Living according to the flesh is the opposite of living in the Spirit and it is ridiculous to even think that we can live as Christians in this way. This is what the apostle Paul accused the Galatians of trying to do.

“Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (Galatians 3:3).

When the Bible mentions people living in the flesh, it is referring to those who live according to earthly principles with minds and emotions programmed by the sin nature. This includes the lusts for sex, food, power, and even religion. Christians are never to live according to the flesh (body). To do so is completely counter to a true experience of salvation in Jesus.

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:5-8)

But Paul told the Christians that they weren't in the flesh, even though they still had the flesh (and would have it until their bodies died).

You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.(Romans 8:9)

What he meant was that the flesh was not in control of their lives.

Paul used the picture of the Jewish rite of circumcision under the Old Covenant to

explain that we, as Christians, have been spiritually circumcised because the body of flesh has been cut off from our reborn spirit. The flesh can no longer dominate us like it did when we had the old nature. This is what physical circumcision under the Law had been foreshadowing all along, but the Jews hadn't understood it's meaning. Believers in Christ still have the flesh, but they are not OF the flesh (do not live by the flesh). They live by the Holy Spirit who dwells within their new nature.

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ. (Colossians 2:11)

Yet the re-education of the mind and emotions of a Christian is still needed in order to bring them into conformity with the truth of Christ. Having a new nature is the main thing, but re-education is essential for that new nature to function properly through our thoughts and emotions. The Holy Spirit facilitates this education process by directly instructing our minds through our new, reborn spirit.

You were taught to stop your old way of life. Your old way was full of deceitful desires. Now you are to be made new in the attitude of your minds. (Ephesians 4: 20-23)

Paul reminded the Galatians that they were not in the realm of the flesh because of the Holy Spirit living inside them. When we depend on the Holy Spirit we are really being ourselves. We are now God's workmanship, designed for walking in the ways that God has already prepared for us.

You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ... For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ..The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. (Romans 8:9-16)

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.(Ephesians 2:10)

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

One major area that requires re-education is our understanding of God's love for us.

Jesus said something astounding to His disciples.

“I am not praying for these alone, but also for the future believers who will come to me because of the testimony of these . . . so that the world will know you sent me and will understand that you love them as much as you love me.” (John 17:20,23)

God the Father loves the Christian as much as He loves His own Son, Jesus! To make sure His followers got it, Jesus repeats this amazing statement.

“And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17:26)

How can we ever need anything else?! To have God's favor and love, as Jesus has His favor and love, means we have EVERYTHING! There is no higher love than God's love, and it is ours...forever! What a reason to celebrate!

Will Christians Be Judged?

Revelation 20:11–15 talks about God sitting on a great white throne after the universe has ended, and all the dead from everywhere, great and small, stand before Him while books are opened to examine their deeds. One of the books is called the Book of Life. Anyone whose name isn't found in this Book is thrown into a lake of fire, a place of eternal separation from God. These people are all unbelievers who have rejected God and want nothing to do with Him anyway. No Christian is present at this Judgment.

“He who believes in Jesus is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the Son of God” (John 3:18).

The Bible affirms that Christians are not judged for sin as the Lord Jesus has taken that judgment upon Himself. However the Bible does say that the works of Christians are tested to see if they can endure.

‘Jesus Christ is the foundation. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is. Fire will test the quality of each person’s work.’ (1 Corinthians 3:11–13)

Misinterpreting this passage can lead to much confusion in the Church. If God has a merit system that grades the believer on his efforts, then there would be a hierarchy in heaven, with some Christians having greater favor than others. Some Christians hold this view.

Others believe that the Bible teaches that all Christians will receive the same rewards in heaven and our works here on earth merit us nothing in heaven. The latter group believes that if a Christian believes he will get a bigger reward for working harder for God, he may have the wrong motivation for serving God. Instead of serving Him out of gratitude for His love, his service would merely be works-based with the hopes of getting greater gain or recognition. Actually the above scripture simply indicates that motives will be exposed when the Christian stands before God, so as to correctly discern the quality of the works he has done. However no scale of merits is mentioned. This is because the only works that make it through the test of fire are faith works.

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.
(Hebrews 11:6)

We are saved by faith and we walk by faith. The only works that have any eternal value are those born of faith. But this faith is not something we conjure up within ourselves or something we earn. It is given to us by God.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Our faith can falter at times, especially during trials, which God uses to sharpen and strengthen us, but even the testing of our faith produces perseverance, which the Holy Spirit works in us. He doesn't let us give up, but keeps encouraging and comforting us in our walk. Our entire life is a faith experience from start to end. In fact Jesus is called the Author and Finisher of our faith.

...looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.(Hebrews 12:2)

The faith Jesus Christ has placed within our hearts, and which the Holy Spirit develops and strengthens, is the same overcoming force that Jesus has. Every Christian has this

kind of faith.

...for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. (1John 5:4)

The Scriptures indicate that we're married to an eternal, risen Christ, a heavenly Husband, who has already defeated the world. But the Church, as the Bride of Christ, is said to be seated with Christ in the heavenlies. Just as He has overcome the world, so have we! Jesus has made us over-comers and intends for us to experience His victory fully. In fact, we can't be anything except over-comers if we truly belong to Him!

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

It is not surprising that every promise of reward given to the Churches in Revelation was all about victory and overcoming.

To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. (Revelation 2:7)

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death. (Revelation 2:11)

To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna.

I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it. (Revelation 2:17)

To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations - that one 'will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery'—just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give that one the morning star. (Revelation 2:26-28)

The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. (Revelation 3:5)

The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of

the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name. (Revelation 3:12)

To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Revelation 3:21)

Each and every promise and reward listed by Jesus belongs to every Christian believer. We eat from the tree of life; we are immune from the second death; we have a new identity that is pure and righteous; we have authority to rule spiritually over nations; we will never have our name blotted out of the Book of Life; we will dwell with God in the heavenly Jerusalem; and we will sit with Christ and the Father on His throne. Our spiritual Husband, Jesus Christ, has provided everything we need right here and now to overcome every obstacle. These are the rewards of the believer.

There are also at least 6 crowns mentioned in the Bible.

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is disciplined in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown” (1Corinthians 9:24,25)

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?” (1Thessalonians 2:19)

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (2Timothy 4:8)

And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. (1Peter 5:4)

Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown (Revelation 2:10)

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. (James 1:12)

These crowns are also applicable to every believer in Christ. The Bible says that Jesus has made us kings and priests, righteous and perfect in the presence of God.

You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:10)

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.

You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks better word than the blood of Abel. (Hebrews 12:22-24)

"In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority" (Colossians 2:9-10).

In Revelation 4:10-11 we see a scene in heaven of twenty-four elders falling down before Jesus who sits on the throne. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.' They indicate that, in spite of what they have done on earth to earn those crowns, only Jesus is truly worthy of glory and honor. In the presence of the Lord Jesus Himself, all good deeds we have done will pale in comparison. A crown will seem an insignificant gift to present to the One who gave His life for us. With such a high position and status, we can easily see why Paul urges believers to walk in a manner worthy of their calling.

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. (Ephesians 4: 1)

"Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your life in that way, (Colossians 2: 6), meaning by faith.

We do not let sin reign in us because we wish to live up to all that we are in Christ. And so we set our minds on things above.

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus...**And God**

raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:11; Ephesians 2: 6).

We have within us a wonderful life, and because we already are different on the inside, we can live differently in the outside world.

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires...Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. (Romans 6:12; Colossians 3: 2).

Development is not by trying harder. We are complete and lacking in nothing. The only proper response is to remind each other of these extraordinary truths and spend our lives giving thanks to God. We do not try to imitate Christian behavior. We live from the life inside us, which is the life of Jesus Christ. We are partakers of the divine nature. The Holy Spirit works in our divine nature to live lives pleasing to God. The Holy Spirit does not overpower us and He does not go against our will. Instead, He wants to lead us by His wisdom as we allow Him to guide us through our personality. Since Christ is our life, we can only be happy when we are revealing Him. As we reveal Christ, we also express what God has created us to be. God will not make us do the things we do not want. Instead, the Bible tells us that God causes the Christian to **want** God's will.

...for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. (Philippians 2:13).

This means that we will actually want what God wants. It will be our greatest desire 'to make every effort to add to our faith goodness, and to goodness, knowledge, and to knowledge, self-control, and to self-control, perseverance, and to perseverance, godliness, and to godliness, mutual affection, and to mutual affection, love. .. (2 Peter 1:5-9)

This is the grace gospel that was preached by Paul and the apostles to the early church. Wherever Christians did not understand this message, there were problems, just as today there are problems in so many churches because this gospel is not known. Too often the Galatian gospel (which Paul said was really no gospel at all) is being taught instead. This false gospel is really no different from the works-salvation of the world's religions. Hinduism, Buddhism, animism, Islam, etc. all labor under law systems that attempt to reach God through meritorious endeavor. When Christianity is taught in a similar fashion, it becomes just another human religion that cannot offer rest or fulfillment. This is why so many Christians in the west and elsewhere, even though

they have beautiful buildings to worship in, music programs, well-known speakers, and Christian books, are still unhappy and depressed. They are not hearing the true gospel. Without the grace gospel, there can be no lasting joy or victory in the Christian walk. Perhaps this is the greatest weakness in the Church today. And perhaps, getting this gospel of God's grace into our churches will once again fill the empty pews and bring revival and blessing to the land.