



Immortality

by Phil Enlow

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Table of Contents

1: The Lie	1
2: Two Kinds of Life	11
3: Different Kinds of Men	17
4: God’s Wrath	22
5: The Gospel	26
6: Resurrection and Judgment	34
7: Fate of the Wicked	48
8: “Everlasting”	54
9: The Process of Becoming Immortal	68
10: Immortality!	79

Foreword

The subject of immortality is one that has intrigued mankind down through the ages. Great bodies of traditional belief have arisen to bolster man's hope of life beyond his present physical existence. This is not surprising in light of the fact that Satan's first recorded lie was, "Ye shall not surely die."

What does the Bible actually teach on this important subject? What is the fate of the wicked? the hope of the believer? What about heaven and hell? What is everlasting life? What about the judgment?

We are enjoined in Jude 3 to "earnestly contend for the faith which was **once** delivered unto the saints." It is our desire to look, with the Lord's help, past centuries of conflicting religious tradition to see what the Word itself teaches. I am persuaded that God desires to open His Word that His people may walk in greater freedom and blessing and inward rest.

It has been thrilling to wait upon the Lord in the study of this subject and many has been the time when my heart has "leaped" for joy at the clarity of truth that shone forth from the pages of the Word. While it is surely true that we know nothing as we ought to know it and that all glorying must ever be in the Lord, this truly is an hour when the Word is being opened as never before. It is a late hour and the coming of our Lord draws near. The following quote from near the end of Chapter 1 is appropriate:

"I believe that in spite of the great spiritual darkness that exists in this hour that God has a remnant, one here and there, that have a heart for truth. When they encounter something new they will be neither gullible nor closed-minded, but will prayerfully search the scriptures, reserving judgment till God brings light and peace through His word."

Chapter 1

The Lie

Several years ago I wrote an article entitled “The Lie” in which I identified a fundamental satanic doctrine and gave several examples of how that doctrine pervades both non-Christian and seemingly Christian beliefs. That doctrine is the statement the serpent made to Eve when he seduced her to rebel against God in the garden. He assured her, “Ye shall be as gods.” Gen. 3:5.

I believe that what I wrote is true as far as it goes. However, the promise of godhood rests upon a lie yet more fundamental: “Ye shall not surely die.” Gen. 3:4. After all, what sort of godhood would be possible if the “god” in question were subject to death? The “divine reign” would be both short and meaningless.

Satan’s immediate aim was to entice Adam and Eve to join his rebellion. Of course the temptation was but a step toward his ultimate goal, that of enthroning himself over as much of God’s creation as he could seduce.

The immediate obstacle so far as his seduction of Adam and Eve was concerned was the consequence of disobedience that God had set forth: “Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.” Gen. 3:3. So long as they believed what God had said, Satan was not likely to succeed in his temptation. Therefore his first priority was to remove this threat from their minds.

To accomplish this he first attacked the weakest link. He did not approach them both together nor did he approach Adam. He made his approach to Eve when she was by herself, away from the covering and protection of her husband. Modern feminists notwithstanding, God’s word still refers to the woman as “the weaker vessel” (I Peter 3:7). She had no business considering such a momentous decision apart from Adam. But the fact is, she did.

Satan first contradicted what God had said, but he did it with a touch of subtlety by saying, “Ye shall not surely die.” In other words he said, “death isn’t really all that certain.” This approach is very typical of Satan. He engages man in what seems on the surface to be a reasonable discussion. However, when you examine what he says closely, he is flatly contradicting God’s word.

His ploy worked. She began to consider in her mind what he had said. This is a bad tactic. The only way to defeat the devil is to stand on God’s word. When we allow the devil to debate God’s word with us we are not acting in faith but in unbelief. We are saying in effect, “Maybe it isn’t true.” We are told in II Cor. 10:5 that the right way to handle the devil is, “casting down imaginations” (or

reasonings) “and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

While she considered his first lie he threw in the clincher. Verse 5 says, “For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” She then opened up her spirit wide to consider what Satan was saying. She took a closer look at the fruit and it started to look good. The more she looked and considered, the more reasonable and appealing Satan’s lie became. Having, in effect, rejected God’s word in the matter by openly considering Satan’s lie she was left with no defense and quickly succumbed to his wiles. She then got Adam to follow suit. Thus did the human race turn from God and Truth to Satan and deceit.

Results of The Fall

Consider for a moment some of the things Satan accomplished in the temptation. First Adam and Eve rejected God’s authority, choosing rather the dictates of their own hearts. This spirit of man being the highest authority has, whether openly or more subtly, characterized human history ever since.

Even concerning those who survived the 40 years in the wilderness and were supposed to be God’s people, Moses’ testimony in Deut. 12:8 was that they were doing “every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes.”

As the Psalmist said in Psa. 2:1-3, “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.”

Note the reference to the people as imagining a vain thing. In the fall man’s mind was corrupted and deceived into believing he could thrust God aside, chart his own course free from divine restraint and get away with it. As Jeremiah said in Jer. 17:9, “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?” What it boils down to is that man is totally corrupt and incapable of properly judging his own condition. As such he is totally vulnerable to Satan’s wiles. The would-be “god” is in reality a mere pawn in Satan’s wicked hands.

This is the true meaning of the “man of sin” and the “mystery of iniquity” referred to in II Thess. 2. Man, created to be God’s temple, instead usurps God’s rightful place and proclaims himself to be his own god. This is referred to as a mystery because it has not always been manifested in an open obvious form. It is also a mystery because lost mankind is incapable of understanding it. Only those to whom God reveals it are capable of understanding.

Modern religious man loves to profess his belief in God while he denies him in works. That is why Jesus referred to their works as works of iniquity in Matt. 7:23. Though the works appeared to be righteous yet they were the fruit of self will and rebellious independence. God was used as a figurehead both for

the sake of outward appearance as well as for the purpose of self-deception. This is a fulfillment of Paul's warning to Timothy in II Timothy 3:13: "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived."

Another result of the temptation and fall was that Adam and Eve essentially branded God as a liar, one who could not be trusted. Worse still, God's motivation was called into question. They believed God had lied to them to serve his own selfish ends, that he was wrongfully suppressing them, holding them back from their destiny through deceit. It has since been impossible for man, apart from a work of divine grace, to truly trust God. Man has become paranoid — truly believing only in himself — distrusting all others.

An example of this can readily be seen in Cain when he went out from the presence of the Lord. His main concern was that everywhere he went, people would be out to kill him. Gen. 4:14.

Another result of the fall was that God lost his uniqueness in their minds. Till that day He had been the one true God to them. Now He was one among many, and Adam and Eve were free to become gods themselves. This is a subject by itself — the absolute supremacy and uniqueness of God and Satan's efforts to pervert man's knowledge of that fact.

It is evident that the threat of death was successfully removed from the minds of Adam and Eve. They obviously believed (at least in the moment of temptation) that they could somehow escape. They believed what Satan had told them: "Ye shall not surely die"

Ancient Pagan Beliefs

This is actually the origin of the belief in human immortality that we can find in many forms throughout history. It would certainly require a large book to attempt to trace this belief in any great detail. However, perhaps a few basic observations would be in order.

Rom. 1:18-32 is a picture of what happened to man in the fall. Verse 18 tells us that God's wrath is for those who "hold the truth in unrighteousness." The word "hold" could perhaps better be translated "hold down" or "suppress." Man by nature thrusts truth from him, choosing rather his own way.

Verse 21 says, "... when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." This certainly confirms what we have said previously concerning the corrupted condition of man's mind. God is the only source of light and truth and when anyone turns away from God he is left only with darkness and delusion.

Verse 25 says that they "changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen." The word "creature" is perhaps clearer when translated as "creation" and "more than" should be "rather than." It was not that man

worshipped creation more than God but that he **rejected** God in order to worship creation. The worship of God and the worship of His creation are mutually exclusive.

One of the chief characteristics of ancient paganism was the worship of nature and natural life. They worshipped the sun as the giver of life. Places of worship developed that were closely tied to natural phenomena held in high regard. It is evident from such scriptures as Deut. 12:2 that idolatry was practiced in special places such as high mountains, hills, and “under every green tree.” Verse 3 speaks of “groves” — further evidence of their veneration of trees perhaps as long-living things.

Their worship of nature was also manifest in their obsession with fertility — the ability to beget and reproduce natural life. In fact scholars even refer to ancient paganism as the “fertility cults.” Thus was sex glorified and incorporated into their religious practices. Even in New Testament times the pagan Greeks had their temple prostitutes. By making sexual lust seem a sacred thing, the devil succeeded in seducing sin-darkened men into the depths of moral debauchery as Rom. 1 shows us.

Natural creatures that showed an unusual ability to reproduce themselves were worshipped. An example of this is the fish who was observed to lay vast quantities of eggs. To some today the fish is a Christian symbol, but this is a fruit of corrupted tradition which in reality reflects the Babylonian roots of much that passes for Christianity today. The ancient priests even adopted a headdress which took the form of a fish with his mouth slightly open. This headdress is still among us today as the mitre worn by Roman Catholic Bishops.

Pagan festivals tended to revolve around natural phenomena such as the passage of seasons. Spring was specially important as it represented the rebirth of life after its seeming death in winter. This was essentially a feast of resurrection and became bound up with tales of gods who died and were reborn. This is reflected in Ezekiel 8:14 where the Lord showed the prophet Israelite women “weeping for Tammuz.” Prior to the feast celebrating the resurrection of Tammuz there was apparently a period of mourning for him — a forerunner of what is known today as Lent.

It is immediately obvious that ancient paganism involved the belief in many gods. Excavations of ancient civilizations have unearthed countless temples and shrines to a wide variety of deities. Some of these deities were supposed to have been men who became gods and others represented natural phenomena such as the sun.

Even this very superficial overview of ancient paganism makes it obvious that Satan was attempting to instill in lost mankind a set of beliefs that would reinforce his original lie, namely giving man a hope of immortality and godhood. Of course physical death very quickly became an evident fact, so

much of religion since has been an attempt to come to terms with the reality of death.

Belief in Immortality

Since ancient times a belief in life after death has been nearly universal. It is true that there have been some materialists (materialism is essentially the belief that only the material world is real, thus death is the end) but by far most of mankind has clung to the hope of immortality.

This hope has taken many forms. One of these is that represented by the many versions of Hinduism involving the belief in reincarnation. In general terms this belief holds that history is an endless process of repeating cycles. Within each cycle a vast number of essentially divine beings are born into a material universe to seek upward development and ultimate release from their material prisons through a long cycle of deaths and rebirths. Thus all living things, whether insects, fish, birds or men are simply travelers at various stages of upward development.

Various versions of this belief have made great inroads into western thought in recent years. The belief has been reinforced by many supposed “recollections” of other lives by a growing number of people. God’s elect need to remember that the spirits that fell with Lucifer have been actively involved with lost mankind ever since and have a vast storehouse of “memories” to supply gullible people who reject truth. It is still “appointed unto man ONCE to die, but after this the judgment.” Heb. 9:27.

Spiritualism in its many forms basically involves the belief that our destiny is to progress upward from one “plane of existence” to another. This material world is one plane among many. Thus men who die enter “the next world” and so forth. This belief has been reinforced for many through seances in which spirits who profess to have been humans who once lived on earth return to speak through mediums. Actually the popular expression for “medium” appears now to be “trance channeler” — still the same thing God warned of in the scriptures (Deut. 18:9-12, for example).

Another manifestation of man’s hope of immortality has been the simple belief in an afterlife. The pyramids of Egypt are based on this belief. Their Pharaohs (who were believed to be divine) were buried in these elaborate tombs where they were supplied with all sorts of things they would need in their afterlife. They were provided with money, weapons, means of transportation and food. There were even cases of servants being killed and buried with their master so he would have servants! Similar examples can be found in many cultures throughout history.

These are but a few examples of beliefs fostered by Lucifer to solidify his hold on lost humanity. He is referred to by Paul as “the god of this world” who

“hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” II Cor. 4:4.

The Elect

Throughout history, however, there has been a different group of people in the earth — a very small group known as God’s elect remnant. They, too, have had a strong hope of immortality based on the Word of God and revelation.

Job 19:25-27 says, “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another” This is a beautiful expression of Job’s hope, not just of a ghostly existence somewhere, but of a resurrection and future bodily life face to face with his redeemer!

The Psalms are full of this hope. For example in Psalm 16:9-11 David says, “... my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”

In verse 15 of the next Psalm he says, “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake, with thy likeness.”

In John 11:25-26, shortly before he raised his friend Lazarus from the dead, Jesus said to Martha, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”

The entire 15th chapter of I Corinthians is devoted to the doctrine of resurrection and eternal life. It is evident from this passage that this doctrine is at the very heart of true faith. The whole chapter is worth quoting but for present purposes a couple of brief quotes will suffice. In verses 51 and 52, Paul says, “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

In verse 53 he says, “... this mortal must put on immortality.” He quotes from Isaiah in verses 54 and 55: “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”

Christ’s victory on our behalf over death and the grave is the reason Paul could encourage us in verse 58 to “be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

While this belief is a living hope revealed by God to the hearts of his elect a merely traditional form of it is widely held by those who profess to be God’s.

Paul took advantage of this fact in Acts 23 when he was brought before the Jewish Council at Jerusalem.

Paul had been raised as a Pharisee (one of the most prominent Jewish sects) and was familiar with the differences in belief between the Pharisees, who believed in the supernatural, and the Sadducees, who did not. He saw in this an opportunity to divide his accusers and so he said in verse 6, “Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.”

His tactic succeeded in dividing the Council. It also shows us that a belief in resurrection was part of the religious heritage of some of Christ’s most ardent enemies — as Paul, himself, once had been.

Truth Perverted

Satan would prefer that men believe his lie as is. However, because of the revelation of God to his people, multitudes of others have come to believe — at least in a dead traditional way — some true doctrines. Satan’s tactic, where he cannot displace truth totally from men’s minds, is to pervert that truth.

Peter referred to this in II Pet. 3:16 when he spoke of those who were “unlearned and unstable” who wrested, or twisted, Paul’s writings as well as other scriptures “unto their own destruction.”

Man, in his corrupted state, is incapable of understanding the scriptures apart from divine revelation. This, however, has not stopped religious man from attempting to understand and use them. Encouraged by Satan, he has developed all sorts of diverse doctrines all supposedly rooted in the scriptures. Such teachers have been responsible for much spiritual destruction. Paul said, “The letter killeth” II Cor. 3:6.

Such religion, religion that appears to represent God but doesn’t, has been a powerful tool in the hands of Lucifer to deceive. Isaiah describes this in Isa. 42:22, “But this is a people robbed and spoiled; they are all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison houses; they are for a prey, and none delivereth; for a spoil, and none saith, Restore.”

One of the greatest tools Satan employs in imprisoning people in false religion is fear. One doctrine that I believe he has made great use of is a perversion of the doctrine of immortality.

Much of traditional Christianity believes that the destiny of the wicked is to be tortured in hell, a lake of fire, forever — a fearful prospect. Preachers make frequent use of this doctrine to gather converts. Men are warned that they must spend eternity somewhere and then invited to profess faith in Christ as a means of escape from eternal torment.

Most of this is useless easy-believism but it does two things — both of which serve the devil’s ends. It does convert some — not to Christ, unfortunately — but to religious systems. Thus are they bound in bundles being

prepared for the fire (Matt. 13:30). Religious conversion by men not sent of God only results in the converts becoming two-fold more the children of hell than the preachers (Matt. 23:15).

The other result is that many are disillusioned by the lack of reality they find in religion and turn away from any interest in Christ, whatsoever.

Hell is most certainly a fearful thing and not to be minimized, yet Satan has succeeded in perverting this doctrine into a tool that has helped to enforce much false religion. People are afraid to question their religion in many cases because the fear of an eternal hell is dangled over their heads.

True Christian faith does not have to be “enforced.” Where people truly believe as a result of God’s revelation to their hearts they will stick around willingly. Jesus may say, “Will ye also go away?” but they will say with Peter, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.” John 6:67-68.

There is a kind of immortality inherent in much teaching about hell. Many of us have heard preachers talk about our “never-dying souls.” I grew up believing this traditional doctrine but it seems strange to me now in the light of the scriptures.

Satan says, “Ye shall not surely die.” God says, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” Preachers speak of the never-dying soul. Jesus warned us to “fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Matt. 10:28. The preachers seem more in harmony with the devil to me!

Satan seems bound and determined to preserve his doctrine of immortality. If he can’t get men to swallow it straight and seek for godhood then he’ll turn it around and use it as a club to enforce false religion.

The idea that God is going to torture lost souls in hell forever and ever is rooted in the idea that the soul is inherently indestructible. You explain to me the difference between being “indestructible” and being “immortal.” I can’t.

Adam and Eve

The Lord opened my eyes to this by drawing my attention to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden. Gen. 3:22-23 says, “And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, **lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever:** Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.”

Notice the reason Adam and Eve had to leave the garden. It was so they wouldn’t live forever. Man had been corrupted and God didn’t want him to live forever in this condition. Yet oddly enough, that is precisely what preachers are preaching — that lost men will live forever in a corrupted condition, tortured and hopeless.

The term “death” has somehow been redefined to mean a certain type of existence rather than an end to it. We have no problem seeing the death of the

body as its end. If I were to try to tell you that the death of the body was not its end, but that the body went on functioning somewhere else in another kind of existence, you would probably consider me insane. If I said the same thing about the soul, most would consider me a fine orthodox theologian.

As soon as the Lord had drawn my attention to Adam and Eve, He reminded me of the scripture in II Timothy 1:10 where Paul refers to “our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and **hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.**”

Suddenly it was clear, and other scriptures flooded my mind in confirmation. Man was prevented from acquiring immortality that would cause him to live forever in corruption on the one hand, while on the other, immortality was provided through Jesus Christ and made available to man through the gospel! Obviously something was wrong with the traditional doctrine of the “immortality of the soul.”

Escaping Tradition

The popular teaching that the soul of man is immortal and will “spend eternity somewhere” is more in harmony with Satan’s lie than it is with God’s Word. Such a statement may seem shocking to some but I believe it would be far more of a shock if God were to suddenly show us the extent to which our minds have been corrupted by false religious tradition.

Paul everywhere had to contend with opposition from entrenched tradition. On more than one occasion, those so captivated tried to see that he was killed. Such is the spirit of false religion. However, in Acts 17:11, Luke made note of the Bereans that “were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”

I believe that in spite of the great spiritual darkness that exists in this hour that God has a remnant, one here and there, that have a heart for truth. When they encounter something new they will be neither gullible nor closed-minded, but will prayerfully search the scriptures, reserving judgment till God brings light and peace through His word.

The promise of Isaiah 42:16 still stands: “And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.” Also Prov. 4:18 says, “But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

If we believe as we have always believed, if we do as we have always done, then we will get where we have always gotten. I speak of professing Christendom that walks in dead tradition and stumbles blindly ever farther away from the light, building Babylon after Babylon, snaring men’s souls.

If we are to get where He has promised to lead us we will not get there by paths that we have known. His light must grow brighter, dispelling the darkness, leading us in plain paths, paths made plain by that light, paths that we have not known because they were not revealed.

Chapter 2

Two Kinds of Life

I believe that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is one that has clouded a true understanding of God's word. It is rooted in a misunderstanding of the fundamental difference between divine and human life.

I Tim. 6:16 uses some interesting words concerning God: "Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen." According to this verse only God is immortal! His life is the only life that there is that is not capable of dying. All other forms of life, whether that of angels or devils, men or beasts, can be ended by death. This is not understood by many who profess belief in the Bible.

A clear distinction must be drawn between God's life and created life. Gen. 2:7 says, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

The word "soul" in this verse is a translation of the Hebrew word *nephesh*. The word expresses the kind of life man possesses as a result of his creation. The expression "breath of life" is more literally translated "breath of lives." No doubt this expresses the fact that in creating Adam, God was creating a whole race, giving him a life capable of reproducing itself. Thus many lives were present in the one individual, Adam.

The Hebrew word *nephesh* and its Greek equivalent *psuche* are used in such a variety of ways in the scriptures as to make a single, precise definition virtually impossible. In many instances they appear to refer to "the life principle that animates all conscious beings." When used this way *nephesh* is something we possess as in the expression "my soul."

Yet that definition falls short of revealing the full picture because "soul" is not merely a thing or an abstract principle. This can readily be seen in the many references to people themselves as "souls."

An example of this is Gen. 46:26: "All the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt, which came out of his loins, besides Jacob's sons' wives, all the souls were threescore and six." Here, then, *nephesh* IS a conscious being, not merely its underlying life principle.

When God breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life, he became a living soul. A soul, in the strictest sense, is what Adam WAS and what we ARE.

We human beings are inclined to think of the soul as something uniquely human. This is not so. In the first place, several scriptures refer to God's soul! Heb. 10:38 says, "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."

In Matt. 12:18, Christ is referred to by the Father as "My beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased." Other examples include: Leviticus 26:11, 30; Isaiah 1:14; Jer. 5:9, 29; 6:8; 9:9; 12:7; Zech. 11:8.

Obviously God is a living conscious being and so fits that definition of a soul. Equally obvious is the fact we have already pointed out that He alone has immortality. This points up the fact that it is possible for a soul to be immortal, but that immortality depends entirely upon the kind of life involved. All other souls possess created life — a life which does not naturally possess immortality.

It is very enlightening to consider some of the other ways the divinely inspired writers of the scriptures used the word *nephesh*. Following are just a few examples. The words appearing with all capital letters are *nephesh* in the original.

Gen. 1:20-21: "And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath LIFE, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, and every living CREATURE that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly after their kind...."

Gen. 1:24: "And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living CREATURE after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so."

Gen. 1:30: "And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is LIFE, I have given every green herb for meat; and it was so."

Gen. 2:19: "And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every LIVING CREATURE, that was the name thereof."

Gen. 9:10, 12, 15, 16: in this passage referring to God's covenant with Noah and all the animals preserved with him in the ark, every occurrence of the phrase "LIVING CREATURE" is a translation of *nephesh*.

Leviticus 17:11: "For the LIFE of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your SOULS: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the SOUL."

Leviticus 24:18: "And he that killeth a BEAST shall make it good; beast for beast."

Leviticus 11:46: “This is the law of the beasts, and of the fowl, and of every LIVING CREATURE that moveth in the waters, and of every LIVING CREATURE that creepeth upon the earth.”

Proverbs 12:10: “A righteous man regardeth the life of his BEAST....”

Isaiah 19:10 contains the phrase “ponds for FISH”! You fishermen remember that you are angling for “souls”!

Man a Beast

It is pretty obvious from these and other scriptures that with the exception of the few references to God’s soul, *nephesh* simply refers to natural created life, whether possessed by man, beast, fowl, fish, insect, or whatever. Man is by nature no more immortal than a mosquito he swats and kills. They both are made from the dust of the ground and possess the same created life.

Most men would be highly offended by the notion that they are essentially animals, yet that is the case. Man does possess a higher intelligence than other animals, an intelligence that makes communication with God possible. However, unless he does come into possession of eternal life through the gospel he remains simply an intelligent beast. In fact, due to his corruption through the fall, he is capable morally of descending lower than a beast.

Consider the thin line that separated Nebuchadnezzar the great king from Nebuchadnezzar the long-haired beast who ate grass like an ox. Daniel 4. For seven years God removed Nebuchadnezzar’s human intelligence from him and for that period he lived like a beast. When his understanding returned he finally realized how nothing he was and he gave glory to the one true God.

Jude 10 speaks thus of the apostate (one who has rejected God): “But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.”

Similar language is used in II Peter 2:12: “But these as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of things they understand not and shall utterly perish in their own corruption.” This verse not only portrays apostates as brute beasts but states pretty plainly their destiny, expressed in such phrases as “taken and destroyed” and “utterly perish.”

Solomon, considered the wisest man who ever lived (apart from Jesus Christ) pondered many questions about this earthly life. In Ecclesiastes 3:18-21 he makes the following observations: “I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?”

Verse 21 almost seems to undo the comparison Solomon had been making. However, other translations establish the fact that the thought is, “who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth?” Evidently he was saying that, contrary to popular belief, man and beast die alike and go to the same place.

Apart from the gospel, Solomon’s inspired observation is absolutely true. It is certainly confirmed by Psalm 49. The Psalmist begins by exhorting all the inhabitants of the world to hear the wisdom he is about to express. The Psalm essentially concerns man’s values in light of the reality of death.

In particular the focus is on wealth as that is one of man’s most prized achievements. In the first place wealth has no power against death and corruption. Regardless of whether a man is wealthy or poor, wise or foolish, he will die and leave whatever he has to others. No matter what a man may achieve in this life, whether of riches or honor, death is the end. None of his wealth or honor will follow him.

Although men try to preserve their memory by such means as naming their lands after themselves, verse 12 tells us: “Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish.”

Verse 14 makes it plain, especially in other translations, that their dwelling place after death is the grave. The Psalmist, however, expresses the hope of the righteous in verse 15: “for he shall redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me.” The grave, however, holds sway over all others.

Lest the lesson be forgotten, the Psalm closes with these words found in verse 20: “Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish.”

These scriptures should be sufficient to make it clear that there is no difference between the death of a natural man and the death of a beast, hard as that may be for some to receive.

For a brief time, in the garden, eternal life was made available to Adam and Eve. They did not, however, partake and as soon as they had sinned, the way to the tree of life was closed off and the judgment God had pronounced — death — took effect.

The death that entered the world through Adam’s sin “passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” as Rom. 5:12 says. In addition, all creation, which had been placed under man’s dominion, was affected and is under God’s curse. Rom. 8:19-21 says, “For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature” (creation) “itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

The Death Principle

Usually when we speak of someone dying, we are referring to the final moment when life leaves his body. This, however, is only the climax. In reality, death is a process of corruption and decay that accompanies us from birth. For awhile, the life force is sufficient to produce growth and maturity, but all too soon it gives way to the principle of death that leads certainly to the grave.

Far more serious is the fact that the same principle is at work in the soul. Eph. 2:1 speaks of the natural man as “dead in trespasses and sins.” See also verse 5. In John 5:24, Jesus speaks of those who believe as having “passed from death unto life.” The next verse speaks of “the dead” hearing the voice of the Son of God. Jesus is not here speaking of a physical resurrection but of a spiritual one through the gospel. He is speaking of eternal life being imparted to a human soul through the gospel.

Before the gospel comes man’s condition is as Paul describes it in Eph. 4:18: “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.”

When man fell, his soul became totally enslaved by the law of sin and death. He came under the total domination of desires and appetites relating to his fleshly existence in this world. Paul’s words in Rom. 7 express so clearly the impossibility of man serving God through his own resources.

The natural man lacks not only the ability but also any desire to serve God. Rom. 3:9-18, Col. 1:21, Eph. 2:1-3.

I John 2:15-17 says, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

It is interesting to note that according to this passage, the lusts that pertain to this world will pass away. That would not be so if corrupted man were to be preserved somewhere in everlasting torment. If that were the case, lust would never cease.

Only the gospel of Jesus Christ, preached by the anointing of the Holy Spirit has the power to penetrate the darkness of a human soul enslaved by sin and resurrect that soul, dead in sin, to eternal life.

It may seem strange to speak of a lost sinner as “dead” while we observe him as a living, breathing human being. Nevertheless the expression is appropriate. Remember Paul’s words, “alienated from the life of God.” When Adam sinned, he cut himself off from God. Were it not for sin I believe he would have lived right on. It was not that he was immortal in himself but that he was sustained through his relationship with the One who is immortal. That relationship was severed and he became dead to God & righteousness.

Let's say that someone you know — someone, particularly, who doesn't know God — dies. Such a death instantly severs any relationship which may have existed. You can shout at him, hit him, do whatever you will and he will just lie there unresponsive. He has become dead to you.

Man has become dead to God. That is why anointed ministry is necessary. The anointing imparts a measure of God's life. Without that measure of life, no one would be capable of seeking or calling upon God.

Anything short of anointed ministry, at best, makes a man merely religious, still totally alienated from God. He may sing "Amazing Grace," pray, go to church, etc., but it is all vain. His heart remains shrouded in darkness and sin. He is still dead.

I Cor. 2:14 says, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." The word "natural" is "soulish" in the Greek. It refers to a man possessing only natural life.

Man, with only natural life, has little to look forward to. James 4:14 says, "For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

Apart from the judgment, man without God, at best, lives for a short time and perishes like a beast. I believe that scriptures we have already alluded to make it plain that when a sinner dies, the light of his soul is extinguished. In other words, his soul does not survive the death of the body. Sinners who appear at the judgment, do so as a result of God's direct intervention: they are raised from the dead to answer for their sins.

Ecclesiastes 9:5 says, "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything."

Chapter 3

Different Kinds of Men

I believe that the scriptures teach that among natural men who know not God there are two types. These are described in Rom. 2:12: “For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law.”

Notice that this verse concerns only sinners, yet a distinction is made relating to the law. One type of sinner has sinned “without the law”; the other has sinned “in the law.”

Rom. 5:12-14 sheds some light on this. Here we see that death passed upon all men as a result of Adam’s sin. Verse 13 is a key: “For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.”

It was a long time from Adam’s sin until God gave the law through Moses. Countless multitudes lived and died in sin. Yet their responsibility toward God was not the same as those under the law.

What does it mean that “sin is not imputed when there is no law”? The word “imputed” has to do with being “charged” with sin. It is one thing to commit a crime. It is another to be arrested, charged, and tried for that crime.

Paul, in his sermon on Mars Hill, referred to past idolatrous practices by saying (Acts 17:30), “and the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.” What does it mean when it says, “God winked”? Simply that He overlooked it.

Does that mean we’ll see them all in heaven? No. Rom. 5:14 says, “Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.” The “similitude of Adam’s transgression” simply means that their sin was not like Adam’s. Adam rebelled against a clear command of God. They simply did what it was their nature to do.

It is true that they violated their conscience, no doubt to the point of totally silencing it, but that is still not the same as rejecting the revealed word of God.

Purpose of the Law

Rom. 3:19-20 says, “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of

sin.” That’s why Paul referred in his sermon to “the times of ignorance.” Those he referred to were ignorant of God’s law.

Notice back in Rom. 2:12 the difference in the consequences. Judgment will only be applied to one type. Those who have sinned without law will not be judged, they simply perish.

What does it mean to “perish”? It simply means that their death is the end for them. God’s pronouncement in Ez. 18:4 still stands: “Behold all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.”

Notice that the death referred to is that of the SOUL. Remember the scriptures that refer to the soul of the beast and that speak of a sinner’s death as like the beasts that perish. The same language is used — “perish.”

This is the answer to one of the unbeliever’s favorite questions: “What about those who have never heard?” I will not attempt to draw a precise line but I know that God knows and will rightly decide who has sinned “without law” and who has sinned “in the law.”

It does seem pretty obvious that the former group would include the countless millions that have lived and died in ignorance of God’s word together with the very young and the severely retarded. Beyond that I’ll let God draw the line.

I do believe that the scriptures do give us hope concerning young children with believing parents. I Cor. 7:14 concerns a marriage in which only one is a believer. It says, “For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.”

There comes a time when a child is responsible to repent and believe the gospel for himself. God knows when that is, but I believe where a loving God takes the child of a believer in infancy that we’ll see them again in a far better place!

All or Many?

Have you ever wondered about Daniel 12:2? This verse says, “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

Why would the Holy Spirit inspire Daniel to use the word “many” concerning the resurrection? Most of us have been taught that everyone will be there on the judgment day. But “many” and “all” are two different things. There is no way to make “many” mean “all.”

Obviously, then, there will be some who sleep in the dust of the earth who will not awake. Therefore this verse either sets forth or clearly implies three classes of humanity: those who sleep but never wake; those who wake to shame and everlasting contempt; and those who wake to everlasting life.

On the face of it, Jesus' words in John 5:28-29 seem in direct conflict with the verse in Daniel. He says, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth;..."

Here Jesus uses the expression "all that are in the graves" concerning the resurrection. A moment ago we pointed out that "many" does not mean "all." However, it is very possible for "all" to mean "many"!

This is very easily illustrated. Suppose I were to stand up in the church assembly and say, "I would like to ask all to stand, please?" In this instance "all" means all. However, if I were to say, "All over 40 years of age please stand," then the "all" becomes "many," restricted by the qualification "over 40." If there is one in attendance under 40, "all" is not in the strictest sense all!

This is the case with Jesus' words. Notice that John 5:29 goes on to say, "... they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

Thus the "all" is restricted to those that have done good and those that have done evil. Most people think that everyone falls in one of these categories but this is not so. It is a question of imputation. Remember that sin is not imputed when there is no law. Those without law sin, but their sin is not imputed to them. Hence so far as God's judgment is concerned they have done neither evil nor good!

It is interesting to note that of the three kinds of men, God does not impute sin to two of them — those outside the law because of ignorance, and those in Christ. Rom. 4:8 says, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Paul is referring to believers in this wonderful passage!

Doing Good

Jesus uses the words, "they that have done good" of this latter class. Doing good, however, is not a matter of works! Once again this is a matter of imputation — in this case imputed righteousness. Rom. 4:6-7 says, "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered."

Rom. 4:5 says, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." It is clearly not a matter of good or evil works that makes the difference. It is a matter of faith or unbelief.

The three classes of humanity could be described as: those outside the law; those under the law; those in Christ. Another way to describe them: those in ignorance; those in unbelief; those in faith.

So we can see that Christ's words concerning the resurrection actually only apply to the latter two classes.

The problem with unbelief is that it is not just the absence of faith. Rather it is willful refusal to believe. Rom. 1:18 says, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.”

Most men when confronted with truth suppress it, hide from it, thrust it from them. This is because they love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil (John 3:19).

This is what Paul is speaking of in II Thess. 2:10 where he refers to unbelievers in the words, “... they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved.” The gospel of Jesus Christ with its message of forgiveness and of the hope of eternal life is an expression of God’s love. However, man, in his desperately benighted condition, doesn’t see it that way. He sees the word of God as his enemy, as a threat to his life of self will and self pleasing.

Thinking as he does, he rejects God’s love and the truth that comes with it. When this happens God sends “strong delusion that they should believe a lie; That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” Verse 11-12.

This parallels what Paul says in Rom. 1:26 about God giving men up unto vile affections and verse 28 where he says that “God gave them over to a reprobate mind.”

Thus the judgment is for those who have been confronted with revealed truth. The outcome of the judgment depends in the strictest sense not on works but upon the response to that truth, whether of faith or unbelief.

Of course works play a part, but they are only the fruit — either of faith or unbelief. The evil deeds of the wicked flow from their unbelieving heart. Likewise any good works of the righteous flow from faith. James 2:20 says “...faith without works is dead.” Gal. 5:6 says, “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.”

So on the one hand we have faith that works and on the other hand unbelief that also produces its own kind of works. Therefore the real issue is one of faith and unbelief. The evil that God judges men for is not just their sins but their unbelief.

In the early chapters of Romans Paul develops the truth concerning man’s need of the gospel. He begins with this basic principle found in Rom. 1:18 which we have previously quoted: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.”

It would be easy in thinking of those outside the law to confuse ignorance with innocence. Millions have died in ignorance of specially revealed truth, such as the law, but they are by no means innocent.

Paul plainly speaks of a knowledge of God that can be derived from creation (verse 20): “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.”

The point of this part of Romans is not that some are responsible and others not, but that the **level** of responsibility varies according to the truth available. Romans 2:2 says, “But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things.” A man born in heathen darkness who lives and dies ignorant of Christ is not as responsible as a man who sits under the ministry of a servant of God, called and anointed to preach the gospel, and then rejects that gospel. The latter has a fearful responsibility.

Peter, in writing of the apostate who hears and rejects revealed truth says this plainly in II Pet. 3:21, “For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.” How could it be better if both face a never-ending hell?

However, even though there is a difference, both types are under the wrath of God as rejectors of the light they do have.

Chapter 4

God's Wrath

The Jews supposed that their knowledge of God made them better than the Gentiles. Paul meets that idea head on in Rom. 3:9-12. "What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

When we confront in the scriptures a phrase like "the wrath of God" we are prone to think only in future terms. We think of great plagues and of fiery judgments poured out upon a wicked world, and ultimately of the lake of fire itself. However this is only a part of God's wrath.

Rom. 1:18 begins, "For the wrath of God is revealed ..." That is **present tense** — **now**. Paul is not speaking here only of future judgment but of something already being experienced by rejectors of God.

We should hasten to point out that when Paul says that the wrath is "revealed" he does not mean that man in general understands or is even capable of understanding this. Remember Rom. 3:11.

I Cor. 2:14 says, "But the natural man" (that is, any man regardless of how intelligent he may be, possessing only Adam's life as a result of natural birth) "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Jesus said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes."

Only those who have been enlightened by Christ are capable of seeing and understanding the wrath of God in the earth. All others have been blinded by the "god of this world," the devil (II Cor. 4:4).

Other scriptures also reveal that God's wrath is not only future but present. In Eph. 5:6, after referring to some specific types of sinners, Paul says, "For because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience." The word "cometh" is **present tense**. Why doesn't Paul say God's wrath "will come" (future tense) if he means to restrict wrath to the future? See also Col. 3:6 for a parallel verse.

How about John 3:36? "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth

on him.” Here the unbeliever is spoken of as continually under the wrath of God. It is apparent that wrath can be more than some obvious calamity or some future final judgment. Many sinners appear to be getting along well (see David’s battle with this in Psalm 73) yet in reality they are under God’s wrath and know it not.

God’s wrath against those who reject the light of nature and of conscience (Rom. 2:14-15) takes the form of abandonment to the control and consequences of sin. This is described in Rom. 1:24-32 using such phrases as: “God also gave them up to uncleanness” (24); “God gave them up unto vile affections” (26); and “God gave them over to a reprobate mind” (28).

Consequences of Sin

Sin has terrible consequences. Our world is filled with violence and wickedness and suffering of every description through man’s rebellion against his Maker.

Galatians 6:7-8a says, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.”

James 1:13-15 says, “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”

Rom. 1:27, for example, speaks of homosexuals as “receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.” In other words there are appropriate consequences that go with that sin. Our present-day problem of AIDS is but one such consequence. **AIDS is an expression of God’s wrath.** That is not a popular sentiment, but it is the truth.

A popular question among unbelievers concerns the evil, pain and suffering in the world. “How can a loving God allow such conditions to exist?” they say. Such reasoning has contributed to atheism in others who say, “**If** there were a God ...”, etc.

As usual man has it all backwards. The believer is able to say with David, “He is the Lord our God: his judgments are in all the earth.” Psalm 105:7. The pure in heart can see God, even in these things (Matt. 5:8).

Should a holy God bless and protect man in his sin? What kind of love would that be? The condition of our world is a witness to the condition of man himself to those who have eyes to see. Unbelieving man wants to blame God (if he even believes in Him) for such things but **man himself is responsible.** God in creation gave man a sphere of dominion and responsibility and he chose to reject God, falling consequently under the dominion of sin. The evil we see in the world is a direct result.

In spite of all this God allows wicked men to experience many natural blessings. In Matt. 5:45 Jesus said of his Father, “he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” This does not cause men to glorify God or to be thankful, however, as Rom. 1:21 makes clear.

In Psalm 107 David repeatedly says, “Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” (Verse 7, for example).

On the other hand judgment doesn't cause a real unbeliever to repent either. Rev. 16:9 speaks of a judgment in which “men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.” Man's condition is far more desperate than we realize. **What God does in the earth He does for the sake of His elect remnant.** The rest are abandoned, turned over to their own corruption.

It is a terrible thing to be abandoned by God, to have no hope, Most of our world today occupies that position, though they are not aware of it.

Of course wrath, in the form of abandonment, is certainly not limited to those outside the law but is experienced by all who reject truth. One such consequence is strong delusion as described in II Thess. 2:11-12, “And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

Such delusion as is described there seals men's fate. No amount of preaching or prayer or anything is able to change the destiny of those so abandoned because God is through with them. One may simply perish like a beast while the other faces judgment and the lake of fire but neither has any hope of immortality.

Truly we need to respect Jesus' words in John 12:35-36 to “walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.” Light of any kind brings responsibility.

The heathen man is responsible for the light of creation and the light of his conscience. In rejecting that light he lives out his brief life under God's wrath and judgment and dies like an animal. So we can see that the man outside the law does experience judgment. However when we speak of **the** judgment as described in Rev. 20 we speak of the final bar of God's justice where those who have been confronted with revealed truth will be called to account.

Paul uses the following language concerning that day: “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are

contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile.” (Rom. 2:5-9). Even the unbeliever in that day will know that the judgment of God is righteous.

Chapter 5

The Gospel

This brings us back to II Timothy 1. Verses 8-12 say, “Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;

“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,

“But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:

“Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.

“For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”

Once again we see that life and immortality are brought to light **through the gospel**. “The gospel” is a potentially enormous subject all by itself. However, as it is also central to the subject of immortality it is necessary to establish some basic truths relating to the gospel.

It is also necessary because “the gospel” is so little understood having been so corrupted by religion. Virtually every group preaches what they call the gospel and the result in most cases is mere religious conversion.

It matters a great deal what gospel is heard and believed. II Cor. 11:4 speaks of “another Jesus,” “another spirit” and “another gospel.” Even in Paul’s day Satan was busy promoting his counterfeit gospel. Verses 13 and 14 reveal Satan’s ability to transform himself as an “angel of light” and the ability of his apostles to transform themselves into “the apostles of Christ.”

By its very nature, a counterfeit is designed to deceive men into believing it is the real thing. It takes a true revelation of God’s word by the Holy Spirit to discern the difference.

The Pharisees of Jesus’ day were very zealous to make converts to their “gospel” but Jesus called one of their converts “twofold more the child of hell than yourselves” (Matt. 23:15).

There are many “gospels” but only God’s gospel will lead to eternal life. That is the one we must have.

The first thing we must see concerning the gospel is the sovereignty of God in the matter. Verse 9 of II Tim. 1 reminds us that our calling is “not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”

As we pointed out in Rom. 3, nobody by nature seeks God. The gospel is the overture of Almighty God to destruction-bound man. It exalts Him and leaves no room for flesh to boast (I Cor. 1:29, Eph. 2:8, 9).

Since man’s problem is his revolt against his Maker it is appropriate that salvation involve complete surrender to a sovereign provision of God. According to I Cor. 1:30 if any man is “in Christ” that has come about as a result of God’s intervention.

Begotten by God

James 1:18 is a very significant verse that also establishes this point: “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”

This scripture says (of believers, of course) that He (God) “begat” us. Since God alone is immortal, then for one of Adam’s descendants to become immortal he must of necessity partake of God’s life. This takes place when God “begets” us, or becomes our Father.

When you beget a child, that child partakes of your life with whatever strengths and weaknesses that involves. According to I Pet. 1:23-24, the seed that produces natural life is “corruptible.” The life produced is compared with grass that quickly fades away.

When God begets us we receive His life. James 1:18 also reveals how this is accomplished: it is “with the word of truth.” That is the means, the only means. As surely as natural seed reproduces natural life so does the word of God reproduce His life in a receptive heart. The Word of God is the seed of God. That is why it is so important.

I Peter 1:22-25 says this precisely: “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

“For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:

“But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.”

Notice how carefully Peter identifies the word to which he refers in verse 25. It is “the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.” It is not the word read in a tract or even in the Bible itself.

The difference is life and death! Paul referred in II Cor. 3:6 to his own ministry as a ministry of the spirit that brings life. This is contrasted with the mere letter which kills.

The ministry of the spirit is certainly not something apart from the scriptures but the scriptures are not enough without such a ministry. If they were, the Ethiopian Eunuch would have had no need of Philip to teach him (Acts 8:31).

That is the point of I Pet. 1:25. While the word of God is the seed of His life, that seed is imparted **by preaching**. Preaching necessitates a preacher.

This is precisely what Romans 10:13-17 says: “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

“How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

“And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

“But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Paul says in I Cor. 1:21, “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” No one receives God’s life unless he receives it through another human being. This is a great stumblingblock. Everybody likes to believe he is smart and capable and can come to God independently. It isn’t so.

Paul’s Conversion

Paul certainly understood this from his own experience. Although Paul (then known as Saul) was suddenly confronted on the road to Damascus by the risen Christ, contrary to popular teaching, he was not saved there. In Acts 9:6 Jesus instructed Saul to “Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.” If Paul was to be saved, he was going to have to humble himself and allow someone of God’s choosing to tell him what to do!

Think about that! All of Paul’s experience and religious training was useless at this point. He had to become as a little child just as Jesus said in Matt. 18:3 in order to be saved. The natural man strongly resents this.

He waited three days, blind, until God sent a disciple named Ananias to him. It was at that point that **Ananias** instructed him to “Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” He had been yet in his sins up to that point. Note carefully that it wasn’t Jesus who told him these things but Ananias, a fellow human being. There is an important divine principle here.

An angel appeared to Cornelius but he had to send for Peter to come and preach the gospel in order to be saved (Acts 10:5-6, 15:7).

The apostles of the early church were called, prepared and empowered to preach the gospel. Jesus had said to his disciples in John 15:16, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.”

Jesus prayed to the Father in John 17:18, “As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.”

In John 20:21-23, Jesus spoke directly to the disciples in similar language: “Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

“And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:

“Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

Think about the authority embodied in this commission. They were literally taking Christ’s place as the vessels through whom God would reveal Himself to men. Their calling even included power to forgive sins! I’m aware that such authority has been corrupted, counterfeited and exercised under the influence of many false spirits, yet true God-given authority of this sort is a valid and necessary part of New Testament Christianity.

After the day of Pentecost God bore witness to their authority repeatedly with signs and wonders. To put it simply those who heard and believed **their word** received eternal life and those who rejected them rejected the God who had sent them and are awaiting the lake of fire.

There are countless thousands in our day who consider themselves preachers but pitifully few who have been sent of God. Remember what Rom. 10:15 says: “How shall they preach except they be sent?” How, indeed? Men do preach, of course, but without the authority of a divine commission and the anointing of the Holy Ghost their preaching is utterly vain and their followers doomed.

The Ministry of Reconciliation

Those who have such a ministry know they have it. One has only to read Paul’s epistles to see how often he referred to his divine calling. I do not believe Paul did this out of pride, to gratify his ego. I believe he was deeply aware how crucial it was for men to hear one sent of God if they were to escape destruction. He understood that he was an extension of God Himself to lost men and that there was no other way they could be saved.

Listen to Paul's words in II Cor. 5:17-20: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new.

"And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

"To wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

Notice how he says that God had "**committed** to us" (God-called ministers) the ministry of reconciliation. What does he mean? He means simply that in order to be reconciled to God one had to receive their ministry. Jesus wouldn't bypass this in speaking to Saul on the Damascus road; the angel wouldn't bypass this; neither will the God who ordained it.

Man hates this. It exposes his independence, self-will and rebellion. Yet no human being will enter into immortality who does not receive the words of a God-sent man.

Paul was very aware that such a ministry could not be carried out through natural human ability. Though God committed a ministry to him, he was not expected to carry it out in his own strength and wisdom. For it to be effective, a joint effort was necessary. That is why he refers to God's ministers as "workers together with him" (God) in II Cor. 6:1.

In Col. 1:29 he says, "Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily." Paul put forth an effort, but as he did so God joined in and the effort was carried out in His strength. Many have gone forth in great zeal to work **for** God but those few God calls work **with** Him as He works through them. (Read the context from Col. 1:23-29 also, concerning Paul's calling.)

This is why Paul says in I Cor. 2:1-5: "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.

"For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

"And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.

"And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:

"That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

I am persuaded that in our day very few have a faith that stands in the power of God. This is because the faith they have wasn't begotten in them by God, but it came from some other source.

Notice how specific Paul's language is in I Cor. 4:15: "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel."

Remember that we're speaking of being **begotten by God!** Yet Paul says, **"I have begotten you!"** Both are true. The seed of God's immortal life is imparted through the words of specially commissioned men. How important, then, is the gospel? **It is the only thing that is important.** Without it man will perish. Nor can he have that life any other way.

This is why most of mankind will perish. They will not come God's way. Prov. 16:25 says, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

Two Ways

Matt. 7:13-14 speaks of two ways, one that is broad and well-travelled and one that is narrow and found by few. Both are ways by which men seek to find favor with God but only one is God's way. The broad way is a picture of man's religious efforts.

Most religious people are like the Jews Paul described in Rom. 10:3: "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."

Consider Paul's words in II Cor. 4:1-6: "Therefore seeing we have have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not:

"But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

"In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Let's return to Rom. 1. Immediately preceding the passage about the wrath of God we find these words (1:16-17): "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

"For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."

First of all the gospel is the power of God. Most of what is called the gospel of Christ today has no power. The “gospel” without power is simply not the gospel, even if the words involved are scriptural and true. Remember, the letter kills. But Paul’s message was an expression of God that had power to save — to rescue men from God’s wrath — to give them immortality.

What makes this power effective in a given individual is faith. They must believe. This faith is not a human ability, however. As Paul says in Eph. 2:8, “... it is the gift of God.” Rom. 10:17 says, “So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God.”

True Faith

Faith is a conviction born in one who opens his heart to God’s anointed word. He doesn’t have to manufacture it or work it up. The anointing imparts to a receptive heart the power to believe. This faith is not mere theory or mental belief but a force that moves the believer to positive action. Divinely given faith exercised brings salvation.

The writer to the Hebrews was concerned that some of his readers might stop short of this point. He refers in 4:1-2 to the Israelites who fell in the wilderness: “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

“For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.”

Their problem was the same as that of most men who hear God’s word. They cling to their hardness of heart and unbelief (Heb. 3:7-13) and though there is power in the word it does not save them. Most who heard Jesus didn’t believe. God’s elect remnant believed — those given by the Father to Christ (John 6:37).

Rom. 1:17 says, “For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” The gospel is something that must be revealed to man. That which is foolishness to most men is revealed to others by the Spirit (I Cor. 1:18-2:10).

What is revealed is God’s righteousness. Man by nature wants to provide his own righteousness, to do something that will make him acceptable to God. The gospel reveals the only righteousness that God will accept: his very own righteousness imparted to us through faith in the death of His Son for us.

Paul then adds the phrase, “from faith to faith.” This expression confirms much that we have said. Just as natural life begets natural life so faith begets faith. In order for a candidate for salvation to have faith to be saved the one ministering must have that faith and be called to impart it. Thus the gospel is the means of transmitting faith from the heart of God’s servant to the receptive hearer: “from faith to” (or unto — resulting in — producing) “faith.”

The result is, “The just shall live by faith.” The just are those made righteous in the manner described in Rom. 4:5, “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”

The word “live” in Rom. 1:17 refers to eternal life — immortality! As Jesus said in John 11:25-26, “... I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

“And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”

The Gospel is the key to immortality. The New Testament preachers saw a world of men headed for destruction and proclaimed words capable of imparting eternal life. Jesus occupied such a position before them. That is why when Jesus asked his disciples if they would leave when others were offended, Peter spoke up and said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast **the words of eternal life**. John 6:69.

Let’s close this portion by returning to the words of Paul in II Tim. 1:9-10 where he refers to God “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

Chapter 6

Resurrection and Judgment

Heb. 9:27 says, "... it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment."

In Chapters 1-5 we have discussed several aspects of the subject of immortality. I believe we have established from the scriptures that only God is by nature immortal; that man, possessing only mortal "soul" life, and that corrupted by sin, will, unless he comes into possession of God's life, perish – the light of his life being forever extinguished; that there is a difference in the destiny of lost men — those sinning without law simply perishing while those sinning under the law being judged by the law; that the gospel preached with the anointing by men sent of God is the only means by which men may become immortal.

Earlier we referred to John 5:28-29: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

I believe that we earlier established that "doing evil" for the purposes of this resurrection has to do with a knowledge of the law. For example, Rom. 5:13 says, "... but sin is not imputed when there is no law."

Obviously there are two kinds of men who will be raised from the dead: some to everlasting life and some to damnation, condemnation, judgement. I believe that before considering the nature of that judgment it would be profitable to further clarify the basis upon which God will judge men.

John 3:19 says, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." We know from this same passage that Christ's coming into the world was not for the purpose of condemning men, but rather to open up a way of escape from sin and its consequences. Nevertheless most men are under condemnation because, loving darkness, they refuse to believe in the light God sends them.

What is Light?

But what is this light referred to by Jesus and recorded by John? Is it, as many suppose, a set of doctrines or traditions? Is it the beliefs of a particular religious organization or sect? Is it some secret mystical revelation? Is it even the scriptures themselves?

I believe that the answer is to be found in John 1:4. Here, John is discussing the coming of Christ into the world and the response of men. He says, “In him was life; and **the life was the light of men.**” Of course the “life” that was in Christ was God’s life. Only divine life has the power to enlighten. No doctrine, tradition, organization, or **even scripture** can enlighten even in the slightest where there is an absence of God’s life!

John 8:12 says, “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” What kind of light? — the light of LIFE.

Note the emphasis here. Jesus HIMSELF was the light. To have light men were to follow HIM. Of course Jesus’ teachings were important but it was not primarily their CONTENT that was crucial; rather it was the fact that the words involved were an expression of the Spirit of life within. “... the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” John 6:63. “... the words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” John 14:10.

If words are not a present tense expression of God they are darkness, regardless of how scripturally correct they may be from a technical standpoint. This is hard for religious man to receive or even to understand.

The Jews of Jesus’ day give us a perfect example. In John 5:38-39 Jesus said, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.” In their opinion, life was to be had by a strict observance of the scriptures (shaped by their convenient traditions, of course). Jesus was telling them that the role of the scriptures was to testify to the true source of life — in Jesus Himself. But they blindly rejected him in favor of their religion.

“... God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself ...” II Cor. 5:19. “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” I Tim. 3:16. Jesus said, “... he that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” John 14:9.

From these and many other scriptures it is clear that the man Jesus was a vessel that God clothed Himself with in order to walk among men, look them in the eye, speak truth in their ears, and in general to make Himself known.

They had a historical God, a God of the scriptures, a God of a hoped-for future, a God in heaven somewhere. But the God who came to them dressed in robes of flesh and blood they could not recognize. This proved that all their high-sounding concepts of God were mere religious delusion. It is easy to believe in a God who is remote from day to day life, who doesn’t interfere with what we want to do.

The glory of God is **reflected** in the creation. His law is **reflected** in man's conscience. But the glory of God that is manifested as He robes Himself in flesh results in a different and far greater responsibility for men who are involved.

In John 15:22, Jesus said, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin." A "cloak" is a covering or an excuse. Think about that verse!

Basis for Judgment

This is the basis for judgment. It is one thing for man to turn away from the glory of God in creation; it is quite another for the same man to MEET GOD face to face and to reject Him.

In John 9:9 Jesus said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Think about that. Jesus the man is no longer in the world: therefore, by his own testimony he is not at this present time the light of the world!

Before you fall out of your chair and brand me a heretic, bear with me for a moment. Jesus, God's Son, is presently at the right hand of the Father. He dwells where no lost man can go. Man has the scriptures yet there is no life, (and hence no light) in the scriptures alone. How, then, are men enlightened today?

They are enlightened in exactly the same way as they were in Jesus' day — by God manifesting Himself in the flesh. Jesus said in Matt. 5:14-16, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

Jesus' words are from the sermon on the mount and were directed to the righteous, to those who would follow him, to the children of God (verse 9). Notice that Jesus said, "Ye are THE light of the world." Obviously this statement was not meant to exclude Jesus himself, but apart from his personal presence in this world, THE light of the world — the ONLY light of the world — is the life of God in the church.

By the church I mean to include only those in the earth who are truly children of God as a result of having seen Him manifested in the flesh and having believed the words of life spoken by Him into their hearts.

Ephesians 3:22 speaks of the church as "... builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." The church is God's earthly house. Men will not find Him anywhere else. In spite of imperfections in the vessels, when anyone meets a child of God, he meets God face to face. Whatever measure of God's life is manifested creates the same measure of responsibility in men to whom that life is manifested.

It comes down to this: the place you occupy on the judgment day will be determined by one thing — how did you ultimately respond when you met God face to face? I used the word "ultimately" because some men become believers

after an initial negative reaction to Him. There is a process of conviction involved. Sooner or later, however, men go one way or the other.

The vast majority of men, because of the blindness of their darkness-loving hearts, do not recognize that it is God who has crossed their paths. They only know that they have been disturbed by something. They may attribute it to the humanity involved or even to the devil himself, but either way they go on as they are. If men are not disturbed to the point of repentance by the light of God's life manifest in human flesh they have nothing to look forward to but judgment.

This is what the so-called unpardonable sin is all about (Matt. 12:31-32). It is one thing to speak against the vessel God uses but quite another to reject the Spirit inspiring the vessel, because that Spirit is God Himself.

The Judgment

The judgment is pictured in Rev. 20:11-15: "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

"And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

"And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

"And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

"And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

The apostle John was permitted by God — for our benefit — to see in a vision the day of judgment referred to elsewhere in the scriptures.

His attention is first focussed on a throne, a place of authority. It is not, however, just a throne, but a **great** throne, setting it apart from the temporal thrones of this world, a throne representing the supreme authority of God Himself.

It is a great **white** throne, reflecting the utter purity and holiness of God. As John said elsewhere, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." I John 1:5. All that corrupt, sin-darkened man is will be made to stand utterly naked and exposed before the pure light of God's holiness.

Think of the prophet Isaiah who saw the Lord upon a throne and said, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." Isaiah 6:5.

Remember also Job who said, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust

and ashes.” Job 42:5-6. Men may feel alright compared to other men but God’s light will reveal the truth. Truly, there is no hope for anyone apart from the imputed righteousness of Christ obtained by faith.

It is no wonder that John in his vision saw “the earth and the heaven” try to flee. Obviously this is a figurative reference to lost mankind.

This is pictured more clearly in Rev. 6:15-17:

“And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;

“And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb:

“For the great day of his wrath is come: and who shall be able to stand?”

The One on the Throne

Both passages refer to the one sitting on the throne and to his face. Who is he? I believe that it will be Jesus sitting on that throne, rejected of men, but chosen of God (I Peter 1:7).

John 5:22 says, “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.” Verses 26 and 27 say, “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man.”

God is a great omnipresent Spirit. He has no “face” except for His Son, “the brightness of his glory and **the express image of his person**” (Heb. 1:3).

Remember I Tim. 6:16: “Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting.” Not only has man not seen God: he **cannot** see Him — not in His essence.

Job “saw” Him through a spiritual revelation. Isaiah “saw” a representation of Him in a vision. The disciples “saw” Him in Jesus. But, as it says in John 1:18, “No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”

It is the face of Jesus Christ that will cause lost men to flee in terror on that day but there will be no escape. Listen to the words of Paul recorded in Acts 17:30-31:

“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

“Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness **by that man whom he hath ordained**; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”

Consider also Phil. 2:9-11: “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

“And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Those who refuse to bow before Christ in this life will certainly do so there. He will be on that throne.

Who will be there?

If Christ is to be the one sitting on the throne, who are the ones who will be brought to stand before him? John “saw the dead, small and great, stand before God ...” (God the Father and His Son are so one in thought and purpose that for men to stand before Christ, God’s anointed, is to stand before God.)

There is a widespread and popular school of thought that holds that only the wicked dead will appear at the white throne judgment. This teaching is part of a body of doctrine that does a great deal of artificial and unscriptural dividing up of the scriptures. Without spending a lot of time unravelling a whole system of belief, suffice it to say that were it not for the fact that so many have been taught this doctrine, I doubt that it would occur to anyone simply and honestly reading the scriptures.

There is no hint of separate judgments of righteous and wicked in Daniel 12:2. Nor is there in John 5:28-29 where Jesus says, “...**THE** hour is coming...” and then proceeds to describe the resurrection of both righteous and wicked.

The verse we began with, Heb. 9:27, refers to “**THE** judgment” — obviously identifying a single day of judgment. Matthew 25:31-46 pictures a future judgment of both righteous and wicked in which Jesus indicated He Himself would preside as judge.

As further confirmation, note that Paul says in Rom. 14:10, “...we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.” II Cor. 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ...” Rom. 2:16 speaks of “**THE** day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.”

Notice also in Rev. 20:12 the presence at the judgment of the book of life. We know that the book of life is a record of those who belong to God (Psalm 69:28; Daniel 12:1; Phil. 4:3; Luke 10:20; Rev. 13:8). What purpose would be served by the formality of attempting to look up everyone’s name in the book of life (as is popularly pictured) if it were a foregone conclusion that no one appearing at the judgment could be found there?

John says that the dead “small and great” will be there. Everyone, regardless of how insignificant or unimportant they may have been on earth, will be there: no one will be “lost in the crowd.” Everyone will be judged on that day.

Where are the dead?

Notice that John refers in verse 13 to the sea giving up its dead and “death and hell delivering up the dead which were in them.” There are questions in many people’s minds as to where the dead are prior to the judgment and perhaps some comments are in order.

Many people today believe that the wicked dead are somewhere in a state of conscious suffering awaiting the judgment. Some even believe they go straight into the flames of hell at death.

It seems rather strange to me to picture God dragging people out of hell — some having been there for thousands of years — to condemn them at the judgment and toss them back into hell! Think about it!

Even if you believe that the wicked are in some sort of “temporary hell,” why would God instruct us to “judge nothing before the time” (I Cor. 4:5) only to violate his own principle by punishing the wicked before their trial?

This teaching is an expression of religious tradition, much of it rooted in old Jewish tradition. It is also based upon a literal interpretation of Jesus’ story of the rich man and a beggar named Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31.

This parable conveys many important truths: men need to live with eternity in mind and not just for earthly success and comfort; once a man dies, his destiny is fixed; unbelief is such that men who will not believe the Word will not believe for any reason, even if one rose from the dead to warn them. Only the living Word has the power to beget faith. Nothing else, supernatural or otherwise, is a substitute.

There is nothing in the rest of scripture to suggest that Jesus meant to portray this story as a literal picture of the present state of the dead. Did Jesus really mean us to believe that the righteous and wicked dead are in some sort of temporary place able to converse with one another?!

This parable certainly conveys important truth as do all his parables yet it is not right to force a literal interpretation of one passage — and a parable at that — to override the rest of the word. The word harmonizes and should be understood in its own light as God reveals it.

In earlier chapters we pointed out the fallacy of the belief in the immortality of the soul. When an unbeliever dies it is the culmination of the “death passed upon all men” Paul speaks of in Rom. 5:12. No part of his being is immortal. Being “alienated from the life of God” (Eph. 4:18) he dies like a beast (Psalm 49:12, 20). “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezek. 18:4).

The word “hell” in Rev. 20:14 is “hades” in the Greek, the equivalent of “sheol” in Hebrew. It simply means the grave and expresses the place men where men wind up as a result of death. Apart from the intervention of God, the grave holds absolute sway over lost men.

There is no consciousness in a lost man from his last moment of earthly consciousness until he is raised from the dead by God to answer for his sins.

Some teach “soul sleep” — namely that souls are “asleep” in the grave until the judgment. “Sleep” is used as an expression in the scriptures for death (John 11:11-14, for example) yet where the wicked are concerned, using the word “sleep” too literally suggests that they are still alive. No doubt such a concept is heavily influenced by the basic belief in the immortality of the soul.

In I Cor. 15, Paul confronts the error of some who taught that there was to be no resurrection. In verse 18 he contends: (If the dead rise not) “then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.” Listen to what Paul is saying: if there is no resurrection and a Christian dies then he has **perished** — that is the end of him. If that would be true for a Christian, how much more is it true of the lost! And I believe it **is** true of the lost until they are raised.

Christians have a far different hope. It is plain from II Cor. 5:8 that Paul expected to go to the Lord’s presence upon leaving his body at death: “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” He also spoke in Phil. 1:23 of his “desire to depart, and be with Christ.”

In John 11:26, Jesus said, “And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” It is true that our bodies die, yet our souls, having been made alive with God’s immortal life, **cannot die**. Rom. 8:10 says, “And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.”

I do believe, however, that the resurrection of Christ marked a turning point for believers. The faith of Old Testament believers is best described in Heb. 11:13: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” The work of redemption that secured the salvation of all believers was not complete until Jesus cried, “It is finished!” John 19:30.

David expressed his hope in Psalm 16:10: “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” The word “hell” used here is “the grave.” It is evident that David expected his soul to be released from the grave at some future point, but it is also obvious therefore that he expected his soul to be in the grave until that time! Of course this passage is also a wonderful prophecy of Christ’s resurrection.

Psalm 17:15 says, “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.”

Psalm 49:14-15 shows the contrast between the expectation of the wicked and the righteous: “Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on

them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling.

“But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me.”

God prophesied through Hosea (13:14): “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.”

I believe the fulfillment of that prophecy began when Christ was raised from the dead. Though the resurrection of the **bodies** of believers awaits Christ’s coming, yet I believe the scriptures teach that his own live and reign with him.

Speaking of Christ’s resurrection and exaltation, Paul says in Eph. 4:8, “Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” (This is a reference to Psalm 68:18). A clearer translation would be, “he led a multitude of captives.” Who were these captives? I believe they were the souls of Old Testament saints being delivered from the power of the grave through what Christ had done.

Incidentally, it is no accident that this is mentioned in connection with Christ giving gifts to men. The gifts are gifted men, men equipped with spiritual abilities that enable them to play a vital role in the work of bringing the Body of Christ to full maturity.

I believe that Old Testament saints — the spirits of just men made perfect mentioned in Heb. 12:23 — have a part in the dispensing and operation of spiritual gifts. They are active in the work of God in the spirit realm. We are afforded a glimpse of this in the words of the angel (remember that angel means “messenger”) who came to John (Rev. 22:8-9): “And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things.

“Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.” See also Rev. 19:10.

The Kingdom of God is far more than what we observe here on earth. There is much going on in the realm of the spirit that we are not as conscious of as we might be.

In many previous articles in the Midnight Cry Messenger, I believe it has been made plain that the symbolic 1000 years referred to in Rev. 20:1-6 is the church age. In verses 4- 6 we read: “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon

their foreheads, or in their hands: and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

“But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”

Notice the distinction between those who live and reign with Christ and the rest of the dead who live not again until that period is over. The scriptures harmonize.

Two Deaths

In verses 5 and 6 we find a reference to “the second death.” This second death is identified in verse 14 as “the lake of fire.” It is interesting to note that in the scriptures there are two births, two resurrections and two deaths.

All men experience the first birth when they are born physically into the world and partake of Adam’s life. Unfortunately, the first birth brings men forth into a state we can call the first death or the death that was passed on all men that we referred to earlier (Rom. 5:12). This is all some men ever know — namely those who perish without law (Rom. 2:12). They are born, they die, and that’s the end of it.

Others die once and then are raised for the judgment where they will be condemned to the second death.

Rev. 20:6, however, refers to a group of people upon whom the second death has no power. These are the ones who have partaken of the first resurrection. The first resurrection is the one referred to in John 5:25: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.” It is a spiritual resurrection and is identical to the new — or second — birth.

Men who have been born twice — once of Adam’s life and once of Christ’s — will taste the first death (unless Christ comes first) but will never taste the second.

Men who are born only once and reject the God who would give them eternal life die twice, once physically and the second time in the lake of fire.

According to Works

On the face of it there seems to be a contradiction between what John says will be the basis of judgment and what we have said previously. In Rev. 20:12-13 he says that men will be judged “according to their works.”

In many people’s minds this suggests that what we do in the way of good and bad deeds will somehow be compared — perhaps on a set of scales of some

sort — and our destiny will depend on our good deeds somehow measuring up or outweighing the bad. This is, of course, far from the truth.

God judges things much differently than we do. You may give to charity and help little old ladies across the street and think that God views your actions as “good.” In I Sam. 16:7 the Lord said, “... the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.”

In Titus 1:15 we read, “... Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.” A defiled mind — defiled by the sinful nature we were all born with and the thoughts and ideas of others so contaminated — is a deluded mind where God is concerned.

This is readily seen in Matt. 7:21-23 where Jesus says that many on the judgment day will point to religious works done in the name of Christ, believing them to be good only to find their works branded as iniquity.

The word “iniquity” is *anomia* in the Greek. Just as the word amoral in English means “without moral principle,” so does the word *anomia* in Greek mean “without law” or “lawless.”

This lawlessness does not necessarily mean robbing banks and committing murder, though. It is a lawlessness as it relates to being subject to God. God isn’t impressed by what looks righteous to men. Read Matt. 23 for a perfect example.

He looks beyond the surface into the heart seeking faith. All else falls short. “Without faith it is impossible to please him ...” (Heb. 11:6). Paul said, “... whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23).

It is impossible for anyone to do anything God regards as “good” unless he has been made a partaker of the faith of Christ through the gospel. That is a hard thing for the natural man to swallow, but it is so.

The problem with “good works,” religious or otherwise, is that they are done in harmony with the carnal mind which Rom. 8:7-8 says is “enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” Notice that Paul says the carnal mind is “not subject to the law of God.” That is “lawlessness” or “iniquity.”

On the other hand, notice Peter’s expression of what God had done in saving Gentiles: “purifying their hearts by faith.” Remember the reference in Titus 1:15 to “the pure”? Faith is the only thing that can purify a human heart.

It all comes back to faith and unbelief. The works that men do are an expression of one or the other.

Now once again read Matt. 25:31-46. Jesus was picturing the judgment for his disciples and the judgment of both righteous and wicked was related to

things they either did or failed to do. The central issue was not a matter of sins as we think of them, however. The judgment was centered around the treatment by men of Christ's brethren. Think about that!

Christ's brethren here refers to believers that God lives in who are yet in the world. The judgment will be based on the response of men, not to God in the sky, but to God in other men. That faith or unbelief is reflected in their works. Those with faith are drawn to and made one with Christ's brethren. Those in unbelief hate the light and do whatever it takes to avoid exposure of their condition.

Remember Christ's words to Saul on the Damascus road: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Saul had not been conscious of persecuting Jesus, but he had been by persecuting His followers. Jesus didn't say, "Why are you persecuting my followers?"

Christ was in his followers and He was the reason for their persecution. Until this experience, Saul, who became Paul, did not understand what it was that caused him to hate and oppose Christians. Of course, not all unbelievers take such measures, but given the right conditions their true nature is exposed. The same crowds that cried, "Hosanna!" when Jesus entered Jerusalem, a few days later joined in crying, "Crucify Him."

All who are joined to the Lord are **one spirit** (I Cor. 6:17). There is no way to separate the Father from the Son, nor the Father and the Son from the Church. Reject one and you reject all; truly receive one and you receive all.

There are only two kinds of men who will appear at the judgment and this is the issue that separates them: faith or unbelief as it relates to God who manifests Himself through human flesh.

No More Secrets

The wicked will be raised from the dead, experiencing their first conscious moment since death. No doubt that moment will be one of confusion and great terror as they begin to realize the predicament they are in.

Seven times in the gospels the writers quote Jesus as saying that in that day there will be weeping (or wailing) and gnashing of teeth. (Matt. 8:12, 13:42, 13:50, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30, Luke 13:28). The lost will be filled with fear, anger, frustration, regret, and despair as they are brought face to face with the Christ they have rejected.

Most men in this world live and die in a state of spiritual delusion, believing lies to be the truth. They believe that they can live as they please and get by. However, on that day they will be made to see clearly. Before judgment is executed God intends to manifest His truth with crystal clarity.

Luke 8:16-17 says, "No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they

which enter in may see the light. For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither anything hid, that shall not be known and come abroad.”

Jesus spoke of man’s purpose in lighting a candle to illustrate God’s purpose in sending light into the world. In our earlier discussion we pointed out that the light is simply God’s life manifest in human flesh, whether through His Son during the incarnation or through the Church. God didn’t send light to hide it but that it would ultimately show everything exactly as it was. As Paul said in Ephesians 5:13, “... for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.” Though men may try to hide from light in this world, nothing will be hid on the judgment day.

In Luke 12:2-3, Jesus said, “For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.”

In Matthew 12:36-37, Jesus said, “... every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

If you listen to a man long enough, his words will reveal his heart. That is why Jesus said in verse 34 of Matthew 12, “... for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” God is listening and has an accurate account. When the books are opened on that day there will be a complete record!

The expression of Christ on earth has always set men on one of two paths: life or death. In II Cor. 2:14-16 Paul says, “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?”

Here the knowledge of God is compared to a “savour” or fragrance. As men react differently to natural smells so do they in the spirit. To most, the anointing of God’s Spirit carries the “smell of death.” They shrink from it and in rejecting it they are set on the road that leads surely to the second death. Thus is the anointing “the savour of death **unto** death.”

But to God’s elect the anointing carries the sweet fragrance of life and in bowing to it they are made partakers of eternal life – thus, it is a “savour of life **unto** life.”

Jesus is Lord

In his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Peter said, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Acts 2:36.

Paul speaks of God’s mighty power, “Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly

places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” Eph. 2:20-23.

Man in general is totally blinded to the Lordship of Christ. Though some have a traditional belief in his Lordship, it is not a revelation to them and thus has no real effect. Phil. 2:9-11 says of Christ: “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

It will be quite a sight to see the wicked on that day – the proud, the arrogant, the self-willed, the rebellious – made to bow before the Christ they have rejected, having joined in spirit those who crucified him.

Nebuchadnezzar was a rare exception among the kings of this earth in that he, through the mercy of God, came into a possession of a revelation of God. Before this revelation (Daniel 4:30) he said, “Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?”

After God had humbled him by removing his intelligence from him, allowing him to live as a beast for seven years, and then restoring him, he testified: “... I blessed the most High, and I praised and honored him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” Daniel 4:34-35.

Men will either bow here, or they will bow there: better to bow here!

Chapter 7

Fate of the Wicked

Rev. 20:15 says, “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.” Verse 14 identifies this as “the second death.”

Because of the great body of tradition regarding the lake of fire, or hell, as it is popularly called, it is necessary to consider from the scriptures both the purpose of the fire and also how long that purpose will take to carry out.

The traditional teaching is that hell is a place where the wicked are abandoned by God to be tortured in fire throughout all eternity without any hope of either escape or an end to their suffering – a terrifying prospect.

Jesus taught on this subject on a number of occasions. The principal word he used that is translated “hell” in the King James Version is the Greek word *gehenna*. *Gehenna* is taken from the Hebrew expression “valley of the son of Hinnom” and refers to a valley outside of Jerusalem.

This valley first appears in Joshua 15:8 and again in Joshua 18:16 where the conquering Israelites were dividing up the land of Canaan. The border between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin passed through this valley, apparently named for some previous owner.

In 2 Chronicles 28:3 we find a reference to the wickedness of King Ahaz: “Moreover he burned incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.” It is plain here that the valley of Hinnom had become a site of heathen wickedness, including human sacrifice.

In 2 Chronicles 33 we find similar references in connection with wicked king Manasseh who, like the heathen around him, “worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them” (verse 3). Verse 6 says, “And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom: also he observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.”

On the other hand we have the account in 2 Kings 23 of the efforts of Josiah to cleanse the nation of its idolatry. Verse 10 says, “And he defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech.” Topheth seems to have been the actual place in the valley where the fires burned.

Jeremiah 7:30-32 says, “For the children of Judah have done evil in my sight, saith the LORD: they have set their abominations in the house which is called by my name, to pollute it. And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart. Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be called Tophet, nor the valley of the son of Hinnom, but **the valley of slaughter**: for they shall bury in Tophet, till there be no place.”

By Jesus’ day the valley of Hinnom had become essentially the city dump for Jerusalem. Refuse of every kind was disposed of in the fires that burned continually. If a donkey or a horse died, its body was likely to be taken to this valley to be consumed in the fire.

Gehenna had become, even in the minds of some Jewish writers of the day, an apt symbol of hell, even being referred to as “the gate of hell.” With all this in mind let us consider some of Jesus’ references to *gehenna*.

Jesus’ Use Of *Gehenna*

In Luke 12:4-5 Jesus instructed his disciples concerning their ministry with these words: “And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.”

Obviously, the One they were to fear was God Himself. These words are recorded for us also in greater detail in Matthew 10:28: “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to **destroy both soul and body in hell**.”

How plain this is! How is it that tradition has blinded so many who read this verse, yet don’t see what it so plainly says? We know what is involved in killing the body, yet here the disciples are warned of One Who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell! As surely as the human body is subject to death, so is the human soul apart from God’s life.

The fires of *Gehenna* were not there to provide a place of torture but a place to burn up dead bodies and other refuse.

The Greek word translated “destroy” in this verse is *apollumi* and is translated in other places as “perish” or “lose.” As is the case with many words, *apollumi* is used in more than one sense. It is used of “lost” sheep that are found, for example. However, the predominant usage refers to a condition that cannot be reversed, usually death. Here are but a few examples:

Matthew 26:52: “... they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.”

Luke 11:51 refers to a man named Zacharias who “perished between the altar and the temple.”

Luke 13:1-2 refers to some that Pilate had brutally killed. In verse 3, Jesus said, “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

Luke 17:27 refers to those who died in the flood in Noah’s day by saying, “... and the flood came, and destroyed them all.”

Verse 29 says, “But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.”

I Corinthians 10:9 refers to those in the wilderness who “were destroyed of serpents.”

The scripture we referred to earlier about the savour of death unto death concerned “them that perish” (2 Cor. 2:15).

Matthew 5:29-30 bring together “perish” and “hell” in each verse. Jesus said, “And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.”

Now what would happen to your hand if you were to cut it off and throw it away? It would most certainly die and decay and ultimately be no more. The alternative in these verses is for that to happen to the whole body in *gehenna*.

Whatever else Jesus meant to convey in this passage, it is clear that nothing in our lives, no matter how vital it may seem to be to us, is worth missing heaven and eternal life for. As He said in Matthew 16:24-26, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Have you ever considered what it means to lose one’s soul? As we discussed earlier, a man’s soul is his life, that which animates him, makes him a living being. To lose one’s soul is to lose one’s life, to die. It is an end to one’s existence as a person. Remember, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” Ezekiel 18:4, 20.

Jesus spoke of one’s “right eye” and “right hand.” Often in a person’s life there is one outstanding thing that rules him, that he considers vital, that he is unwilling to give up in order to possess eternal life.

Consider the rich young ruler of Matthew 19:16-22. In spite of all his efforts to be righteous and serve God, Jesus knew that riches possessed his heart. That is why He said, “yet lackest thou one thing.” God will not occupy second place in anyone’s life. Whatever is most important to us is in reality our “god.” Think of how the rich young ruler will feel on the judgment day when he fully realizes the consequences of his decision to reject Jesus.

Fire Not Quenched

Jesus' words are also recorded in Mark 9:43-44: "And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." The following verses say the same of feet and eyes.

On the face of it this sounds like a never-ending process, particularly if you have been taught to believe that it is. Remember, however, that Jesus' hearers were very familiar with *gehenna*, the city dump.

In the first place the word "never" would be more accurately translated "not." The concern of anyone facing the prospect of such a fate would naturally be, "Is there a way of escape? How can I survive?" Jesus is simply saying that no one will survive who is cast into hell.

The point of Jesus' description is not to teach of never-ending fire and immortal worms but of forces of destruction that are absolutely inevitable. No one will figure out a way of escape or a way to quench the fire. It will do its job.

There is a difference between "quenching" a fire, that is, putting it out, and a fire that goes out for lack of anything else to burn. In the city dump the fires burned and the worms feasted continually – but not on the same garbage. Any particular item of trash would soon be nothing but ashes and smoke and the fires would go to work on something else.

Twice in denouncing the religious leaders of his day in Matthew 23, Jesus used the word hell (*gehenna*). Verse 15 says, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." Verse 33 says, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"

Both verses describe people spiritually begotten by the wrong spirit, sealed in their condition, who, though living, were as surely headed for the lake of fire as if they were already there. Though Jesus was speaking about people who were extremely zealous about the scriptures and sincere in their religious practices, he could see past their religion and discern that they were the offspring of snakes – demons. He said on another occasion, "Ye are of your father the devil ..." (John 8:44). This is a terrible condition to be in but it describes the overwhelming majority of earth's population today.

Many other scriptures associate fire with judgment. In Matt. 3:7-12 John the Baptist spoke of the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to witness his baptizing of people in preparation for Christ's ministry.

The Wrath To Come

In verse 7 he said, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" In this verse he identifies their true spiritual condition

and then relates what he is saying to the final judgment – “the wrath to come.” What is that wrath like? He goes on to tell us.

In verse 10 he compares men with trees that are expected to bear fruit. He says “... therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.”

In verse 12 he speaks of Christ, “whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Two pretty clear pictures are drawn for us here. In one, unproductive fruit trees are thrown into the fire – obviously to be burned up, not tortured! In the other, a wheat harvest is pictured in which the kernels of wheat are separated from the useless chaff which is **burned up**.

John was not talking about literal fruit trees and chaff: he was speaking of the destiny of men who will experience God’s wrath. His wrath will result in their being burned up. As Heb. 12:29 warns, “... our God is a **consuming** fire.”

Malachi 4:1 says, “For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.”

How plain is this language: “stubble”, “burn them up”, “leave them neither root nor branch”! This verse certainly describes a fire that does a thorough job. There is no future of any kind for a plant that has neither root nor branch!

In Matt. 7:19 Jesus said, “Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.” Heb. 6:8 speaks of those who, having been fully exposed to the gospel, reject it and continue in sin: “But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.”

This is confirmed in Heb. 10:26-27: “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall **devour** the adversaries.”

Matt. 13:40-42, part of the explanation of the parable of the wheat and tares, says, “As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

Verses 49 and 50 repeats the same thought through another parable: “So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

All of these scriptures should make it pretty plain what the purpose of the lake of fire is, namely, to burn up the wicked completely.

Chapter 8

“Everlasting”

Matt. 18:8-9 is one of the passages which speaks of cutting off a hand or plucking out an eye to avoid the fire. Verse 9 calls the fire *gehenna* fire. Verse 8 in the King James Version calls it “everlasting fire.”

The word translated everlasting is an important word to consider in any discussion of the judgment. The word “everlasting” is *aionion* in the Greek. It is a word used to describe things and is related to the word *aion* from which we get our English word aeon. To explore the meaning of these words and the special combinations they are used in, the best place to start is the simple noun *aion*. What is an *aion*?

The root meaning of *aion* is “a very long time.” The word, by itself, does not mean “eternity” or limitless time, however. Probably the best single English word that expresses *aion* is “age.”

An age is a long, but not limitless, period of time. It extends far beyond the lifetime of a man and far beyond the memory of any race of people. Nevertheless it has a beginning and an end. One age follows another making it obvious that it doesn’t mean eternity. If eternity is forever, how could there be more than one?

Most of the time *aion* by itself is translated “world” in the King James Version. However, to keep it simple, we will use “age” in referring to scriptures containing the word – as many other translations do.

I Tim. 1:17 refers to God as “the King, eternal” In the Greek the expression is literally, “the King of the ages.” This is a wonderful contrast to the reference to Satan as “the god of **this** age” in II Cor. 4:4! God’s authority is over all ages.

Heb. 1:2 refers to God’s Son, “... whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also **he made the ages.**” God is the One who made the ages. He is before, above, outside of, greater than all ages – He made them – and He did it through His Son, Jesus Christ, His appointed heir.

According to Heb. 11:3, “Through faith we understand that the ages were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” God had only to speak and the ages were established.

God alone knows when this present age will reach its end. In Matt. 24:35-36 Jesus said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not

pass away. But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.”

Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill in Acts 17:22-31 contains a marvelous picture. We see God as the creator, the giver of life. We see God’s desire that men should escape their ignorance, repent, and come to know Him, because of an appointed day of judgment.

Concerning men, verse 26 reveals that God “hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.” See the sovereignty of God in all of this. The times, the bounds of men’s habitation, the day of judgment are all determined ahead of time. Man has no say whatever in the course of the age he finds himself in.

Perhaps a good working definition of an age in the light of scripture would be: **“a span of time, predetermined by God, during which a divine purpose is carried out.”**

Not only is an individual man’s life during this age brief, but human history itself has an absolute limit imposed upon it. When God’s purpose is complete, He will cause an angel to declare “that there should be time no longer” (Rev. 10:6). Man’s one hope of surviving this age and living to see another is to possess God’s life. God’s purpose in this age is to gather a people for Himself out of the whole race of Adam.

All of this imposes an absolute set of limits upon mankind. Man cannot determine his future. He cannot overcome death. He cannot escape judgment. He cannot even draw his next breath without God’s permission!

However, in his benighted and rebellious condition he has set out to attempt just that. Psalm 2:1-4 says, “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision.”

The Psalm also refers to God’s decree concerning His Son and the fact that the only wise course for man is to make peace with both God and His Son!

Another word often translated “world” in the New Testament is the word *kosmos* from which our English word “cosmos” comes. Whereas *aion* refers more to the predetermined span of time, *kosmos* refers to the established order of things.

The world order that exists in this age is an evil, corrupted order. It expresses the purpose of both devils and mankind to rebel against God. That is why Paul warns us in Eph. 6:12, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

The *kosmos* around us is ruled over by an organized hierarchy of wicked spirits headed up by Lucifer. In God’s wise plan He is permitting, within limits,

this *kosmos* to operate. During the course of this age, it serves His purpose but the present world order will not survive the passing of this age. I John 2:17 says, “And the *kosmos* passeth away, and the lust thereof”

Those who belong to Christ are no longer a part of the present *kosmos*. Jesus, in his prayer for his disciples (and for all believers to come) in John 17:16, said, “They are not of the *kosmos*, even as I am not of the *kosmos*.”

The word *kosmos* makes a wonderful study in itself but for our present purposes let’s return to *aion*. I believe that a clearer understanding of this word will make it easier to consider the meaning of the related word *aionios* and perhaps to strip away some of the tradition surrounding its use.

This Present Age

The simplest place to begin an orderly discussion of *aion* is to look at scriptures where it is used in the singular — that is, to refer to a single age. Many verses refer in one way or another to “this age” or “this present age.”

In Mt. 13:22 Jesus spoke of some in whom “the care of this age” would prevent his word from bringing forth fruit.

In Luke 16:8 Jesus drew a contrast between “the children of this age and “the children of light.” The children of this age refers to those born only of soul life whose interests and understanding are completely restricted to this present age.

Paul, in Rom. 12:2, exhorted us to “be not conformed to this age”

I Cor. 2:6 refers to “the wisdom of this age” and “the princes of this age that come to nought.” However impressive this world order and its ways may seem, it has no future. As Prov. 16:25 says, “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” Truly we need God’s wisdom.

In II Cor. 4:4, Satan is referred to as “the God of **this age**” who “hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” Since Satan is the destroyer (Rev. 9:11) and since life and immortality are brought to light through the gospel, Satan’s efforts to blind are no surprise.

Gal. 1:4 speaks of Christ “who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of God and our Father.” We referred earlier to Eph. 6:12 where Paul spoke of “the rulers of the darkness of this age.”

In II Tim. 4:10 Paul wrote that Demas had forsaken him, “having loved this present age.”

Titus 2:12 exhorts believers that “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present age.”

From these and other scriptures we can see a picture begin to emerge. In the present age God has, in his wisdom, allowed an evil world order to prevail. This order is ruled over by Satan and his evil hosts. It is being used by God to bring

about His purpose, to gather a people (the children of light) out of this world and to prepare them to live with Him forever. When that purpose is fulfilled, there will be no further need for this age to continue.

The Sovereignty of God

Devils and lost men alike hate and despise the words of Paul in Rom. 9:22-23: “What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.”

God truly has a people in the earth who are “afore” prepared unto glory. What does that mean? It simply means that we are witnessing the outworking of a Divine plan that began before the world.

Remember II Tim. 1:9 where Paul referred to God, “who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began”

Eph. 1:4 says, “... he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world”

Verse 9-12 refer to God as “having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.”

The carnal mind of man rebels against such truth and accuses God of being unjust. Paul gives a reply to such reasoning in Rom. 9:20-21: “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?”

The reason believers can have rest and hope in God is that they’ve come to see that the basis of their salvation was settled in the will and purpose of God before the world was. Heb. 4:3. Our proper response when God reveals this to us is to believe, surrender and begin to cooperate with his purpose to conform us to his Son. Rom. 8:28-39.

The Age To Come

The child of God sees this present evil age as a means to an end, a “furnace of affliction” to purify his faith and to make him ready for eternity. He knows he is not truly part of this age but only a stranger passing through to something far

greater. Like Abraham he looks “for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Heb. 11:10.

Several scriptures refer to the age to come. Here are a few:

Mt. 12:32 speaks of the unpardonable sin (a rejection of the Spirit of God that would reach out through an anointed man) and says that “it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, neither in the age to come.” Here are two distinct ages referred to in one verse, making it obvious that *aion* doesn’t mean eternity or forever.

We have a similar reference to two ages in Luke 20:34-36: “And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this age marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.”

I believe that most things we experience as a part of this age, pertain only to this age as is the case with marriage. And what a wonderful promise is contained in the words, “neither can they die any more”! Immortality!

Eph. 1:21, in speaking of the exaltation of Christ, refers to both ages: “Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come.”

In Heb. 6, a serious warning is given to those who would turn away from the gospel and refers to those who “have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come” (verse 5). Where the gospel is truly preached with divine anointing, we do taste the powers of the age to come and God holds us accountable.

Ages

The word *aion* is also used in the plural, in the sense of “ages.”

Eph. 2:7 speaks of God’s purpose toward His elect in these words: “That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.” Here we see not only one age to come but “ages” — many! How many we don’t know but I believe that God will continue to amaze and delight us from age to age as His plan unfolds.

By contrast Col. 1:26 refers to “the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints.” I Cor. 2:7 refers to the mystery, “even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory.” “Before the world” is literally “before the ages.”

Think about that! Not only are there many ages — this verse refers to a “time” **before the ages!** Our lives are but a passing vapour in a small moment of one age, yet God’s purpose in bringing forth the ages was fully formulated before they ever began! Truly He is a mighty God, a God to be feared, served, praised, trusted! How unthinkable it is for puny man to rise up in pride and

rebellion against One so great and yet in his blindness and sin he does — to his own destruction.

Eph. 3:9 says much the same thing, speaking of the “fellowship of the mystery which from the ages hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.”

Jude 25 takes it all in, being literally translated, “To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, before every age and now and unto all ages”! No doubt that is why He is referred to in I Tim. 1:17 (literally) as the King of the ages! He’s over all of them. Satan’s power — which only serves God’s purpose — is about to run out.

The End Of The Age

Several passages refer specifically to the “end of the age”: Mt. 13:39, 40, 49 concerning the separation of wheat and tares; Mt. 24:3, the disciples’ question concerning the signs of the end; Mt. 28:20 and Jesus’ promise to be with us until the end; and Heb. 9:26 concerning Christ’s sacrifice once in the end of the age.

The word translated “end” is interesting in each case. It doesn’t mean simply that time runs out and the age ends in that sense. Rather it means the consummation. The consummation is the complete fulfillment of the purpose connected with the age. Thus the disciples’ question in Mt. 24 actually concerned how to recognize when God’s purpose in the age was coming to a climax of fulfillment.

Jesus referred in the passage to the abomination of desolation which involves God abandoning man to his wickedness. I believe we are living in the hour when Rev. 22:11 is more and more being fulfilled: “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.”

We see much religion in our day, but God has abandoned most of it and religious devils, masquerading as angels of light have taken over. We see fewer and fewer people even able to be convicted in our day, let alone converted. It is very late in this present age.

The only reason the age isn’t over is that God is rapidly finishing His work in the earth prior to burning it up. Rom. 9:28. II Pet. 3:10.

Unto The Age

There are a number of special combinations of words used in connection with *aion*. Most involve the Greek word *eis*. In most instances this word means either “into” or “unto” depending on the context. The difference is easily illustrated. If I go **into** a room I pass through the door to the inside of that room. If I go **unto** a room I stop in the doorway: that is, I reach the room but don’t actually go in.

The first category involving this word “unto” is the simple expression “unto the age.” This phrase is most often translated “forever” in the King James Version. Let’s examine together several examples.

In several places in Hebrews we find the writer referring to Jesus as a priest “forever” (unto the age) after the order of Melchisedec. Heb. 5:6, 6:20, 7:17, 21. In this passage the contrast is being drawn between the priesthood under the Old Testament law and the priesthood of Christ.

Does the Lord mean for us to understand that Christ’s priesthood is literally “forever”? Will He still be performing priestly duties a million years from now? A billion? A trillion? I doubt it. What need will there be for a priest when God’s purpose for this sinful age is finished and His people are fully redeemed? The former things will have passed away according to Rev. 21:4. Do you believe there will be sin there needing a priest to offer a blood sacrifice to make an atonement?

The contrast drawn is not between a man’s natural lifetime and “forever” as we think of it, but between a natural lifetime and the age as a whole. Heb. 7:23-25 says, “And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” What a wonderful promise!

Aaron, Eleazar, and all the other priests who served under the law were only able to serve their own generation. They lived, died, and their priesthood passed to others. Christ, on the other hand, is God’s ordained priest for the whole age. Through the offering of his own blood the way has been made into the very presence of God.

Though generations of believers have come and gone from the earthly scene, God’s priest is alive and on the job. The one offering, made upon the cross, was enough for believers of all generations. And his intercessory work is promised till the work of redemption is complete!

This is glorious truth and should give us rest as we trust our salvation into Christ’s capable hands.

For our purpose here, however, it is interesting to note the use of “unto the age.” It should be evident that the phrase in and of itself doesn’t necessarily mean “forever” as we think of it. The overall context of the passage involved and the witness of scripture as a whole must be considered. Of course, if God doesn’t help us, we can’t know anything!

In John 6:51 Jesus said, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live unto the age: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Did Jesus, by his choice of words, mean to imply that a man who so eats would live only till the end of the age and then die? Of course not! He was

simply drawing a contrast between those who eat only natural bread and die (and thus do not live “unto the age”) and one who would receive Him as One sent of God to impart divine life. Though the body of such a one would die, yet he would not. Of course, because of the kind of life Christ imparts he would live on forever.

In the first instance “unto the age” was used of Christ’s priesthood which does apply specifically to this age alone. In the second example it is used of something which **by its very nature** does indeed last forever. It is not that “unto the age” means “forever”; rather we must examine the subject being discussed in the context to understand what is meant.

Finality

In Mt. 21:19 Jesus cursed a fig tree saying, “Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward unto the age.” It is obvious that Jesus wasn’t speaking of an age-long process of a tree vainly trying to bear fruit. In fact, the tree died then and there. The phrase “unto the age” here indicates a **finality**.

Within the natural order of things conditions may change. A tree may bear no fruit one season and then bear the next. A curse such as the one Jesus pronounced was a final determination so far as that tree was concerned. It’s day was over. There was no further opportunity to bear fruit.

Far more serious is the fact that the same can be true with regard to men. A man may live wickedly and then through the grace of God be brought to repentance and thereafter live for God. However there comes a time when a man who has had real light and has spurned it is turned over to darkness with no hope of recovery.

This is what Jude had in mind when he described apostates. In verse 13 he said, “Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness unto the age.”

It is one thing to be in darkness and quite another to be in a darkness God has reserved for you unto the age. There is no recovery from that — nothing to look forward to but judgment.

Remember, an age is not only a span of time, but a span of time **with a divine purpose**. God’s purpose involves separating the children of darkness and light and preparing His own for an eternal future.

“Unto the age” most often expresses the contrast between temporary things that we know as a part of natural life and God’s purpose for the whole age. Unless it is used of something that by its nature is eternal, it doesn’t mean forever.

In I Peter 1:25 the word is spoken of as “unto the age” in contrast with natural seed. God’s seed — “the word which by the gospel is preached” — imparts His own immortal life. Natural seed produces only soul life.

I John 2:17 says, “And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth unto the age.”

John 10:27-28 says, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” “Never” is literally “not unto the age.” The “not” is actually a double negative — two distinct Greek words — creating a special strong emphasis! Truly in Christ our security is complete!

Separation

We can readily see the separation that takes place among men in these various uses of “unto the age.” Some men reach a state where there is no forgiveness and where they are reserved in darkness. Others, through the gospel, partake of life and enter a state where their destiny is likewise fixed. The judgment at the end of the age is to fully reveal these fixed destinies and to properly reward each kind.

There are a few scriptures which use the phrase “unto the ages” (plural). None refer to the wicked. Most refer to God or to Christ.

One example is Luke 1:33: “And he shall reign over the house of Jacob unto the ages; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.” In addition to the phrase “unto the ages” we have the reference to a kingdom that has “no end.” It is pretty plain in this and every other use of “unto the ages” that forever is meant.

Several verses contain the same idea as Rom. 11:36: “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory unto the ages. Amen.” (Rom. 16:27, Heb. 13:21, I Pet. 5:11, Rev. 1:6). There will truly never be a time when glory and praise will not properly be due to our Heavenly Father and to His Son, Jesus Christ!

Another familiar verse refers to “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and unto the ages.” Heb. 13:8.

The Ages Of The Ages

The strongest expression involving *aion* is one literally translated “unto the ages of the ages.” There are only three verses which apply that phrase to the wicked and we will wait till last to discuss these as well as uses of the adjective *aionios* in connection with the wicked.

All but one of the other uses of “unto the ages of the ages” refer to God or to His Son. Several ascribe glory and praise (Gal. 1:5, Phil. 4:20, I Tim. 1:17, 2 Tim. 4:18, Rev. 5:13, 7:12, I Pet. 4:11).

Rev. 1:18 says, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive unto the ages of the ages, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.” Several other verses refer to either Father or Son as living “unto the ages of the ages” (Rev. 4:9, 10, 10:6, 15:7).

Part of Rev. 11:15 is included in the famous “Hallelujah Chorus” from Handel’s *Messiah*: “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign unto the ages of the ages.”

The one verse referring to believers is Rev. 22:5: “And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign unto the ages of the ages.”

The way *aion* is used in each of these instances together with the context of each verse and the witness of scripture as a whole indicates clearly that “forever” is what is meant.

Aionios

Now, leaving for a moment the verses referring to the wicked, let’s consider the adjective *aionios* — usually translated “eternal” or “everlasting.”

When referring to God and His kingdom the word is used to describe many things including: life, weight of glory, house (body), glory, salvation, redemption, Spirit, inheritance, consolation, power and dominion. As we noted in our earlier discussion, *aion* means an age, **not forever**. Only the context can determine whether the word is used in connection with something that is in fact forever.

Aionios is, as we have said, an adjective based on the noun *aion*. An adjective is used to describe something. If I say that something is “watery,” you think of water and know that that thing has the characteristics of water. Something that is *aionios* has characteristics related to what we know of an age.

Most often the word is used to draw a contrast with something that is temporary, of short duration, perhaps limited to a natural lifetime. As we noted in discussing *aion*, so it is true of *aionios* that it is related to the purpose of the age and the fixed destinies that come about as a result of the gospel.

Mark 10:29-30 says, “And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world (age) to come aionian life.” Here we see “aionian” life related to the age to come. Is aionian life forever? Yes! It is forever because it is God’s life which cannot die and not because aionian in and of itself means forever. *Aionios* is used to describe this life — “age life” — to contrast it with mortal life or life that is subject to death. Age life is not subject to death and so lasts for the age. Because it is not subject to death, this life will, of course, also endure through the next age and all ages to come!

Temporary Or Permanent?

In using the word *aionios* of such things as salvation (Heb. 5:9), redemption (Heb. 9:12) and inheritance (Heb. 9:15), we see the Lord expressing to us a part of His divine purpose for this present age as well as the contrast with lesser temporary deliverances.

Jesus referred to the possibility of a temporary deliverance in Mt. 12:43-45 where unclean spirits leave a man, return to find their house empty, and enter in with seven other worse devils. II Pet. 2:20-22 also refers to temporary deliverance.

However, when salvation is “aionian,” it is “unto the age.” This expresses a permanent salvation, a fixed destiny, as we discussed earlier. Eph. 4:30 speaks of the “Holy Spirit of God whereby ye are **sealed** unto the day of redemption.” See also Eph. 1:13-14. Only when a believer is **sealed** does he have aionian salvation.

This is contrasted with Mark 3:29, another reference to the unpardonable sin: “But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of aionian damnation.” The word “damnation” in this verse is actually the word “sin” or “offence.” No forgiveness “unto the age” is linked with aionian sin. This clearly speaks of an offence against God so decisive that it results in a fixed destiny. Surely no one would argue that an aionian sin is a neverending sin!! *Aionios* doesn’t mean neverending.

The Wicked

With all this in mind let’s consider seven scriptures referring to the wicked that are traditionally associated with the concept of neverending torment.

The first is Mt. 25:46 where Jesus is speaking of two groups at the judgment: “And these shall go away into aionian punishment: but the righteous into life aionian.” We’ve already discussed aionian life. The alternative is aionian punishment or torment. One of the popular arguments of tradition is that if aionian life is forever then aionian punishment must also be forever. I think we have demonstrated that this is just human reasoning and isn’t necessarily so.

That there is suffering, pain and anguish associated with this destiny is unquestioned, but the use of *aionios* in no way expresses a neverending process. It is the judgment that is part of the purpose and climax of the age. It is one thing to break man’s laws and be sent to jail — something temporary; it is something else to so sin against God’s love as to be rejected of Him and sent to the fire. There is a finality about that. That is “age” judgment.

Aionian Fire

Three scriptures specifically refer to aionian fire. One is Mt. 18:8: “Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from

thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into aionian fire.”

Remember our earlier discussion of gehenna fire and its purpose. It is a fire which cannot be prevented from totally burning up whatever is put into it. What reason other than religious tradition is there to cause us to assume that aionian fire means “eternal” or neverending fire?

In Mt. 25:41 we learn that Jesus will at the judgment say to the wicked: “Depart from me, ye cursed, into aionian fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” The main reason for God’s gehenna fire is to destroy the devil and his hosts. It is also the place, however, where God will destroy both the souls and bodies of the wicked (Mt. 10:28).

Jude 1:7 is a most interesting verse: “Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of aionian fire.”

The fire that fell on Sodom and Gomorrah is called aionian fire! What about that?! If aionian fire never ends, we ought to be able to go to the Middle East and watch it still burning today! That would be quite a grisly tourist attraction! Clearly aionian fire speaks simply of irresistible total destruction.

Eternal Death?!

Incidentally, there is not one single occurrence of the popular phrase “eternal death” in the scriptures. I wonder where that came from?! Perhaps we might do better to examine our traditions in the light of God’s word instead of examining God’s word in the “light” of tradition! Yet the latter is what most people do! Most people who read these words (if they get this far) will simply say, “This is not what I’ve been taught and I know that that’s right: therefore this is wrong.” It would be good if we could humbly come to God, letting Him know we don’t know anything as we ought to know it, that we are dependent upon Him and trust Him to show us what He wants to — in His time.

The Smoke Of Their Torment

There are three scriptures that use the phrase “unto the ages of the ages” of the wicked. The first and the most commonly used scripture to justify belief in neverending torment, is Rev. 14:10-11: “The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up unto the ages of the ages: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.”

Leaving aside for a moment the great weight of scripture pointing to destruction as the lot of the wicked, let's note some things about this verse. First, the torment takes place "in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb." Do you really think that Jesus and his angels will spend eternity beside a lake of fire listening to tormented souls scream?!

Secondly, the only thing in this scripture that is "forever" is the **smoke**, not the torment. What an apt picture of total destruction! — the wicked are utterly consumed by the flames and only smoke remains drifting away forever.

David spoke of exactly the same thing in Psalm 37:20: "But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; **into smoke shall they consume away.**"

The expression in Rev. 14:11 concerning the wicked having no rest day or night has to do with the lack of spiritual rest during their lifetime of worshipping the beast and his image, etc. This scripture is saying the same thing we find in Isaiah 57:20-21: "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

A close examination of Rev. 14:10-11 yields the same conclusion that is so clear in the scriptures as a whole. There is perfect harmony.

The second scripture is Rev. 19:3 where again we see smoke rising up for ever and ever.

Tormented Day And Night

The third scripture is Rev. 20:10: "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night unto the ages of the ages."

The devil being cast into the lake of fire appears to take place before the judgment scene in verses 11-15. At the very least, therefore, there is a period of time while others are judged that he will be tormented continually — hence the expression "day and night."

However, what does "unto the ages of the ages" mean in this context and usage and in the light of the rest of scripture? As we noted earlier "unto" can mean "into" or "unto." If we think of the last moment of this present age as a kind of doorway into all the ages that follow, the question is: does the devil pass through that doorway and continue to suffer forever or does he suffer "**unto,**" or right to the very threshold of eternity, his miserable existence ending right there?

I believe the answer lies in John's glimpse through that doorway in Rev. 21 and 22. In Rev. 21:4 John spoke of the eternal future when he said, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

If there is to be no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain beyond this age, how can anyone believe that the lake of fire will still exist? The lake of fire **is** the second **death** and there certainly will be nothing but sorrow, crying and pain there. Lest there be any doubt about it, John adds, “for the former things are **passed away.**”

All of those things will pass away with the ending of this age. They will not be carried over into the next. How perfectly this harmonizes with Peter’s words in II Pet. 3:10-13: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

How clear all of this is when the Lord opens your eyes. When God is through gathering his elect and preparing them for glory, all else will be totally destroyed and a new age will be launched with a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness.

Chapter 9

The Process of Becoming Immortal

In our discussion of the biblical truths concerning immortality, it remains for us to set forth, in such measure as the Lord enables, the immortal state which is the destiny of God's elect and something of the process involved in reaching that destiny.

Earlier, in Chapter 5, we discussed the truth that the gospel is the key to immortality (II Tim. 1:9, 10). God begets children by anointing chosen men to preach his living word. Where that word finds a lodging in believing hearts, children of God are born.

It is very evident, however, that entering into a fully immortal state is not something that happens instantaneously. Even allowing for the vast numbers of those who merely profess salvation without possessing it, we must admit that true believers exhibit all manner of weakness: they sin; they may experience seasons of doubt, discouragement; they often manifest anything but the nature of the God who has begotten them; they get sick; they get old; and they die.

The process of bringing a man from his lost, sinful state to full sonship and immortality is long, involved and without shortcuts. It is a process infinitely beyond our power. That is why our Heavenly Father has provided a perfect Savior who is "able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25).

The Day of Jesus Christ

Paul expressed his understanding of this truth in Phil. 1:6: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Notice carefully the duration of this work — "until the day of Jesus Christ!" Paul was writing to believers who died over 1900 years ago, yet there is some part of Christ's work in them that is continuing at this moment!

I believe that God's work in His children is so perfectly planned and scheduled that when Christ comes back they will have all arrived at the place He has ordained for them. Believers who die in various states of ignorance and carnality will find that God has appointed means to finish the work on the other side. None will be left behind. What God starts He will finish, one way or another. Of course, when we speak of God's work being completed on the other

side, we're not talking about deliverance from sin, but matters of full maturity, knowledge, wisdom and understanding.

Only time and God's revelation will fully unveil what God has in mind for us as He finishes the work and cuts it short in righteousness (Rom. 9:28). I believe that He **has** revealed that He intends to restore His remnant church to the power and glory she enjoyed briefly at the beginning.

It is the place of Christ, the Head, to lead and provide for the church which is His body. It is the church's place to lift her hands in childlike faith and surrender to her Head that He might finish the work the Father has appointed.

We stand upon the very threshold of eternity and God would have His remnant to be made aware of the glory that He has planned and provided through the death of His Son. As a result of the sleep-inducing influence of the spirit of the age and the spiritual lack in dead religious tradition, the relative handful of God's people in the earth are asleep and need to be awakened. It is midnight and the Bridegroom is coming! It's time to wake up and get ready.

As we noted earlier, it is evident that Christians sin. Even the most illustrious saint (as we might judge such things) has not passed beyond the experience of coming short while yet in the flesh. There are some who would claim to have entered into such a state, but they are deceived. John wrote (I John 1:8), "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Note that he says "we," including **himself** in the statement.

If we are honest, we must admit the presence of sin, not only around us, but also in us. The truth is that, in the wisdom of God, though we have been begotten of God and made new creatures in Christ, yet sin remains present in our bodies which are yet mortal.

Two Natures

Immortality begins deep within as God resurrects our spirits through the gospel. This is the first resurrection (Rev. 20:6). This first resurrection only affects our spirits. Until the day when we die or Christ comes, we must contend with the fact that we have two natures that are in conflict with one another.

One part of us loves God and His ways. It loves God's word and the fellowship of His people and longs for a full deliverance from this present evil world. The other part loves sin, hates God's ways and wants unceasingly to live for self.

The story is oft told of a simple Christian brother who expressed this conflict in the following manner: he said that inside of him were two dogs fighting, one white and the other black. When asked which dog prevailed, he answered, "whichever one I feed the most." This is a simple, yet profound truth that touches us all where we live.

God has purposed that we, in a practical sense, serve Him in spite of the presence of sin both within and without. Many have discovered in frustration

and sorrow, as Paul did, the futility of trying to serve God with mere human strength (Rom 7). His anguish reached a climax when he cried, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24).

Paul had to learn, as we must, that only through relying upon God’s power can we serve God and please Him (Rom. 8:1-4).

In the first part of I John 4, John warned believers of attempts by demon-inspired men to lead them astray. In verse 4 he encouraged them (and us!) by saying, “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”

This is our only hope — the presence of Christ within — not only in order to overcome and serve God, but also of future glory as well. The essence of Paul’s message to the Colossian believers (Col. 1:27) was, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

We are promised his presence with us unto the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). Jesus himself said, “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

The Reign of Christ

The Captain of our salvation has a commission from the Father to bring many sons to glory (Heb. 2:10) and has received all authority in heaven and earth that he might do just that (Matt. 28:18-20).

In fact, the “church age” as we often refer to it can aptly be titled “The Reign of Christ.” Christ’s reign began with His death, burial, resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father. This is the basis of the glorious words in Rev. 12:7-11:

“And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

“And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

“And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

“And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.

“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.”

Satan was utterly defeated at the cross. The practical outworking of that accomplished fact is, however, a process. That is why Paul in I Cor. 15:24-26 speaks of an ongoing reign that will reach its climax when death itself is abolished.

We experience that reign as Christ works in us through his indwelling presence, through the fellowship of believers and especially through the ministry of his living word that instructs, encourages, corrects and energizes our faith.

Paul exhorts us to “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and has professed a good profession before many witnesses.” (I Tim. 6:12).

We are told that “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” II Cor. 10:3-4.

The Way of Suffering

Christians must realize that the pathway to full immortality is one of suffering and overcoming whatever challenges to faith a loving Heavenly Father appoints.

There are but two races of men: those in Adam and those in Christ. It is the destiny of everyone in Adam’s race to die. It is the destiny of those in Christ to be made alive (I Cor. 15:22).

In Matt. 16:24-26, Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Those of Adam’s race seek at all costs to save their natural lives, blinded to their corrupted condition, willingly ignorant of their end.

To follow Christ, however, means to die that we might live; to crucify the life we received from Adam through our natural birth that we might have God’s life.

The Judgment of This World

Christ’s own death is the pattern: He literally laid down his own natural life on the cross. Though He personally was not corrupted by sin, yet he willingly took on himself the sin of the world. All the sin and guilt of humanity was heaped upon him and he died, as it were, as the representative of Adam’s race. In judging him, the Father was passing sentence on a corrupted race.

Shortly before the cross Jesus said, “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.” (John 12:31).

When he died, Adam’s race died. When he arose in victory over sin, death and the grave, “Christ’s race” rose with him. All of history from that time till the end of the age represents the outworking of those facts.

What God did in Christ cannot be undone. No man can rise up in rebellion and cause Adam's race to live. No devil in hell can stop God from saving His elect with a full and complete deliverance. These are facts that God wants us to reckon on.

We express our faith in what God has done when we enter into true apostolic baptism. We, by faith, lay down our lives in a watery grave and then rise up to newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4). That faith commitment is the beginning of a life of death and life as God works in us.

Conformed to His Image

It is God's plan to conform us to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). Christ is spoken of in Col. 1:15 as "the image of the invisible God." Jesus himself said to Philip, the disciple, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." John 14:9. Hence, in reality, we are to be conformed to the image of the Father Himself. This is not a physical resemblance, of course, since God is Spirit, but is rather a likeness of character.

In most human beings we see the expression of Adam's nature manifest through their words, attitudes and actions. God has purposed that His children be brought to the place where, like Christ, they manifest His divine nature. This is a process.

This process is not, however, just an individual thing. When Christ comes it will be for a "glorious church not having spot, or wrinkle or any such thing; but ... holy and without blemish." Eph. 5:27. The word that He sends and anoints will do the job. That is why Eph. 5:26 speaks of "the washing of water **by the word.**"

As the remnant church is restored to the faith and order it once enjoyed I believe we will see the fulfillment of Eph. 4:11-13: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

A Complete Expression of Christ

It is not that we will individually measure up to Christ; rather, the life of Christ will be fully expressed through his body, properly joined together and looking to him as head. In the same passage (Eph. 4:7), Paul says, "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." Each member will express, in union with the whole, his divinely appointed measure of the whole. Together, the expression of Christ will be complete.

We serve a God who is well able to do what He has promised, to finish what he has begun. I believe that God is looking in this hour for a people who simply

believe Him. I don't mean a mere head faith, but a heart faith produced by the living word that causes people to seek Him, to long for the fulfillment of His word, to willingly do His will as He makes it known, and especially to be joined to Christ's body as it is formed.

The last item is necessary to emphasize because we live in an age that glorifies independence and self will. These characteristics, which spring from the Adamic nature, are everywhere evident in religion and affect God's remnant who are scattered therein.

Repenting of Religion

I believe that God's people in this hour need not only to repent of what we call sin, but also to repent of our religion, however sincere. Paul was undoubtedly one of the most sincere practitioners of religion the world has known, but when the revelation of Christ came, he repented and turned his back on his proud religious heritage, counting it as "manure" (Phil. 3:8). From then on his life became one of dying to his old nature that the life of Christ might be manifest in his flesh. II Cor. 4:10.

The process of death and life that worked in Paul is what enabled him to be an effective servant of Christ, not only ministering to his own generation, but, through his inspired writings, all generations to follow.

Jesus Learned Obedience

Denying the flesh involves suffering, whether our flesh suffers a simple denial of its will or actual physical suffering. Even Jesus had to **learn** obedience by the things he suffered (Heb. 5:8). We are exhorted in I Peter 4:1 to arm ourselves with the same mind. God wants His children to be able to recognize His work in them that they might cooperate and be thankful instead of resisting and complaining. If we understand these things it does indeed provide an "armor" for our minds that enables us to withstand Satan's attacks during times of trial and difficulty. God even gives grace to "glory in tribulations" (Rom. 5:3)! For that to happen requires grace, doesn't it!

For us to be overcomers, we must overcome! A lot of folks would like to be thought of as "overcomers" who don't even recognize the enemy's attacks, let alone overcome them. Paul exhorted us to "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Eph. 6:11-12.

There is an old hymn that expresses this truth:

Am I a soldier of the cross?
A follower of the Lamb?

And shall I fear to own His cause?
Or blush to speak His Name?
Must I be carried to the skies
On flow'ry beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize
And sailed through bloody seas?
Are there no foes for me to face?
Must I not stem the flood?
Is this vile world a friend of grace
To help me on to God?
Sure I must fight if I would reign,
Increase my courage, Lord;
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
Supported by thy word.

Is It Possible?

As we behold the present condition of what is called Christianity it seems absurd and impossible to suppose that the Church can be restored. Let us remember, however, that it is not "religion" that will somehow be changed: in fact the condition of religion will get much worse as darkness takes full control of those in Adam. The restoration promised will only affect the Remnant Church, God's elect, that tiny minority of believers actually begotten of God. They will be delivered from the bondage of religion and made one with Christ and each other.

Do you suppose that Jesus prayed in vain that believers would be made perfect in one as He and the Father were one? (John 17:20-23). What would be the need for such a prayer if it were only to be realized in Heaven?

We serve a God who calls those things that are not as though they were (Rom. 4:17). He can do that because He is God and has the power to do what He wants. We have all heard the old joke that poses the question, "Where does a 500 lb. gorilla sit?" The answer, is, of course, "Anywhere he wants!" How much more can God do whatever He wants. Who is able to stop Him? As Paul said, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

As He reveals His promises to us and creates in us the faith to believe and as we exercise that faith, daily crying out to Him for their fulfillment, we will see God do what our unbelief would tell us cannot be done.

He Can Do It Again!

What God has done once, He can do again! Those who experienced the power and glory the church briefly enjoyed after Pentecost were "men of like passions as we are." They were made of the same stuff, they had the same flesh

we do. What is different is the time and purpose of God. He provided the means for the church to begin in a blaze of glory in spite of the weakness of human flesh. At the appointed time and through the appointed means He not only can, but will do what He has promised. We need to be praying, “Lord, fulfill your word, and help me to be part of it.”

As the darkness of satanic power fills the earth and totally possesses the minds of lost mankind, so is the light growing for those whose **hearts** are turned heavenward. Note that we must turn to God from our **hearts**. As we do so, whatever veil there may be that hinders us from seeing His glory and being changed into the same image will be removed (II Cor. 3:16-18).

God will have no respect for any who honor Him with their lips but whose hearts are far from Him (Matt. 15:8-9).

The Christian Life

Paul’s understanding of the life of a Christian is eloquently expressed in Phil. 3. We have already referred to the fact that Paul regarded everything of his old life as a natural man, including his completely sincere practice of religion, as manure, something to be utterly cast away.

He was able to do this because God had revealed Christ to Him. There is no point in trying to get people to “serve God” who haven’t had Christ revealed to them. Anything less than a revelation of Christ through the anointed word can only produce religious hypocrites. God is not interested in people “trying to be Christians” through their own efforts. He wants to make new creatures out of them (II Cor. 5:17). He said, “I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them.” Heb. 10:16.

Paul saw as a matter of spiritual revelation that his call was to be fully identified and made one with Christ as he expresses in Phil. 3:10: “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made comformable unto his death.”

He saw clearly that there was a life to be given up and also a life to be gained, not just as a matter of legal standing before God, but as an ongoing process of more and more fully being enabled to express the life of Christ in his mortal flesh. He saw in Christ the power to bring this about.

He expressed his attitude toward this process in the following words (verses 12-14): “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

Paul used the word “press” in recognition of the fact that his quest had to be undertaken in the face of opposition from his own flesh within and from Satan and the world without.

I believe Satan has greatly influenced and intimidated believers through the centuries, causing them to feel that they are up against an overwhelming enemy and that victory is hopeless. In reality, Satan and all his hosts lost their power at Calvary! Col. 2:15. The only power they have is through lying and deceit. As God continues to restore his living truth by the anointing, His people are going to stop listening to Satan’s lies. As Jesus said in John 8:31-32, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

Paul recognizes in Phil. 3:15-16 the fact that we don’t know everything, especially about our own hearts. His exhortation is to steadfastly look to God, keeping any ground we have already gained, in the knowledge that God, who knows our hearts can reveal to us needs we are not aware of.

That is why we can have hope. As Paul says in Phil. 2:12-13, “... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” What God has given us in Christ is to be worked out (not **for**!) secure in the knowledge that as we do our part, He will faithfully do His.

A Warning

Paul goes on in Phil. 3:17-19 to warn of those who were living to gratify their own earthly, fleshly desires. The end of men like that is destruction.

The life of a Christian is to be lived with heaven in mind. Our purpose for living is not to be swallowed up by this world and its ways but to be prepared for immortality.

Verses 20 & 21 express this: “For our conversation” (manner of life) “is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”

This is our hope! When Christ comes our bodies will be changed: no more pain, sickness, death, weakness, and above all, sin. We will be like Him!

Romans 8:16-19 says, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.”

The purpose of God for this present age will reach its full climax on that day when His sons will be manifested. This is the same as “the day of Jesus Christ” referred to in Philippians 1:6. It is the day Christ returns. To “manifest” something is to put it on open display, to remove speculation, ignorance, and questions that may have existed. It is to pull back the curtain to reveal what has been hidden.

Imagine, if you will, that in a certain place a sculptor has been commissioned to make a statue of some important dignitary. Typically this kind of work is carried on in secrecy, hidden from curious eyes. Then at the proper time everyone gathers together for an unveiling ceremony. Someone makes a speech telling what a fine, important fellow the subject of the statue was and that we should all admire and emulate his heroic deeds. Then, as the band plays, the covering over the statue is removed and the previously hidden work of art is “manifested” for all to see.

I really believe that a lot of Christians imagine that one day Christ will come and carnal believers will somehow magically be transformed into full-blown sons of God! This is not so. That would be like the sculptor erecting a block of stone, covering it with a cloth and then without using a single tool removing the cloth to reveal a finished statue! God is the sculptor, through His Son and by His Spirit. There is a work that is being rapidly completed as the end approaches.

It is the work that He has promised to perform until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6). It is a work that is “in us.” It is a work to conform us to the image of His Son (Rm. 8:29). Not only is the actual work hidden from the eyes of unbelievers: they are unaware that there is any such thing going on. It will come as a total shock when Christ appears, his elect are “unveiled,” and He says to a perishing world, “Now, let me show you what I’ve been doing. Let me show you what this age has been about. Let me show you what your blindness and rebellion and self-will have caused you to miss.” Remember Paul’s words: “The glory which shall be revealed **in us**”! This is the same Paul who spoke of the mystery he preached as “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). Is it any wonder that there will be weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Many will cry and scream and beg for another opportunity, but there will be none. “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (II Corinthians 6:2).

What Will We Be Like?

There is no purpose in speculating about all of the details as to what we will be like on that day. Even John, who was privileged to receive great revelations didn’t know the answer to that. Hear his words in I John 3:1-3: “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons” (little children) “of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it

knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”

All John could say (and all we can say, therefore) is that “we shall be like him.” That hope is what causes us to purify ourselves (verse 3) and to “press toward the mark” as Paul puts it. If our hope were for a magical transformation from carnality to spirituality there would be no purpose in putting forth such an effort.

I want to add special emphasis to the point that we need to not speculate as to the details of what it means to be brought to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13). We all have carnal ideas about “perfection.” There are many doctrines around — most notably many coming under the general heading of manifested sonship — that, I believe, miss the mark. Just as God has not revealed when that day will be, neither has He revealed in detail what we will be like. Let’s walk by faith and leave that to Him.

Always remember that what is needed is not some kind of religious self-effort, but a “fight of faith” that looks to cooperate with the work of God. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus...” (Eph. 2:10).

Chapter 10

Immortality!

What will happen on the day Christ returns (that we can say without speculating or guessing!)? What about believers who have died? What about those who remain?

One important passage in this regard is I Thessalonians 4:13-18: “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

Christ will come in the sky bringing believers who have died with him; their new bodies will come forth from the grave; then, when that is done, the bodies of still living believers will be transformed and they will likewise rise up to meet the Lord in the air.

This will not be a hidden or “secret rapture” as so many teach. It will be open, before all the world. Revelation 1:7 says, “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, A-men.”

We know from other scriptures that when Christ comes and believers are gathered to him that the fires of destruction will rain down upon a rebellious world (II Thessalonians 1:7-10).

The question naturally arises in our minds: “When will these things take place?” Paul deals with that in I Thessalonians 5:1-11. He says that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night — totally unexpected — so far as the world is concerned. We are encouraged in verse 4 that that day will not come unexpectedly for believers. What that means precisely in terms of what we’ll know and when, we can’t say now. But I believe that God’s children will be made ready and will be awake and expectant when Christ comes. We can trust the details to him. Our part is to be sober and looking to him.

God Will Prepare Us

Noah was warned and led step by step by God and was safely in the ark when the flood came. Lot was warned and led out of Sodom before its destruction. I believe we can expect the same God to prepare and deliver His people today.

It will be more and more important as time goes by to be in union with God's people in a practical sense. We are exhorted in Hebrews 10:24-25, "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and **so much the more**, as ye see the day approaching."

God revealed Himself to Noah giving him a plan. Noah and his household worked together on God's plan — not their carnal ideas — and were prepared and delivered. God has a plan today and it is being revealed in Christ's body through means of His choosing. We need a heart and ears — deaf to religion — but open to God — free to cooperate with Him in the finishing of His work.

Resurrection

Virtually the entire 15th Chapter of I Corinthians is devoted to teaching regarding resurrection. Apparently some at this time were teaching that there was no resurrection, which, if true, meant that they had believed in vain (verses 2, 17). What good would it do to serve God and live a life of self denial only to die in the end with no hope of resurrection?

If there were no resurrection, then, of course, Christ himself was still dead. Paul responded with the eyewitness testimony of many, including himself, who had encountered the risen Christ.

The resurrection of Christ himself, however, was only the beginning, the promise of resurrection and full deliverance for all of God's children. Verses 22-23 say, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming."

Notice that in verse 24, "the end" is clearly identified with the resurrection of believers. This is the climax of the reign of Christ (verses 25 and 26). Christ's reign is to fully deliver every blood-brought child of God from this present evil world. That will be completely accomplished when He returns.

Paul gets into some discussion of the nature of the body we'll have. Most of his comments tell what our bodies won't be like rather than what they will. No doubt this is because we'll just have to wait and see! We do know, however, that they won't be like anything we've known on earth. Our bodies here are appropriate for our earthly existence. Through our five senses we are able to act and react with relation to our earthly environment. Verse 50 plainly tells us, however, that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."

Our earthly bodies are entirely unsuitable — even if they were free of sin — for the life to come. Paul uses several expressions to describe aspects of our new bodies: “incorruption,” “glory,” “power,” “spiritual,” “heavenly.”

From the testimony of those who saw Jesus after his resurrection we know that He was not subject to the limitations we are familiar with. He could appear and disappear (Luke 24:31,36). Walls were obviously no barrier to him. Gravity had no hold upon him. He was entirely ready for the life to come! And so will we be!

Paul concludes his teaching on resurrection with the oft-quoted passage beginning in I Corinthians 15:51-52: “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.

“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

The Last Trump

Notice that all of this takes place at “the last trump.” In the book of Revelation we are told of seven trumpets to be sounded. It is very interesting to note some of the things that are said about the seventh trumpet — the last.

Revelation 10:7 says, “But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.”

Notice the word “days.” I believe this scripture is referring to a period of time during which the remnant Church receives the final revelation needed for the completion of God’s work in this age. This revelation is not something that is apart from or that goes beyond the scriptures. Rather it is an opening of our spiritual eyes to see things in the Word hitherto not revealed because it wasn’t God’s time.

Revelation 11:15 says, “And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.”

Verse 18 continues to describe the scene: “And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldst give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldst destroy them which destroy the earth.” It all fits! It is not for us to pry into and try to unravel things God hasn’t revealed as yet, but He has revealed what we need to know to be about the Master’s business.

Peter certainly confirms what we have said in II Peter 3:10-12, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night: in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these

things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?"

Heaven

If you were to ask the average church-goer what the destiny of believers is, he would probably say something like, "to live in heaven forever." This is just one more example of religious tradition! The Bible teaches no such thing!

In II Peter 3:13, Peter tells us what he and other believers of his time were looking for: "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

In an earlier chapter we referred to Revelation 21:1-4 which clearly confirms this: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away: and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Do I believe in heaven? Most certainly! Paul knew that to be absent from the body meant to be present with the Lord (II Corinthians 5:8). But even what we call "heaven," as beautiful and wonderful as I believe it is, is not our final resting place. Even now believers who have passed over to its blessed shores are being prepared, as we here are, for a new creation far beyond our present power to comprehend.

All the beauty we find here in this world is but a dim reflection of what is to come. When the new creation is here we won't even remember this one! Isaiah 65:17.

Isaiah 51:6 says, "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished." What a glorious hope! It makes a big difference if we are able to see beyond this evil world to what God is preparing. All that we experience here is designed by an all-wise Heavenly Father to prepare us for another world.

Indeed the new creation is already underway and has been for a long time. Paul said in II Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new." The

word “creature” is “creation.” The new life that is begotten in a believer through God’s living word is part of the new creation.

Our Destiny

What is to be our place in the new world? Where do we fit in? A look back to the beginning is in order. Genesis 1:26-27 says, “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.”

God already had a Son, by whom He made all things (Heb. 1:2), who became our Lord Jesus Christ. I believe it was the Father speaking to His Son who said, “Let us make man in our image.”

Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15), “the express image of His person” (Heb. 1:3), “the image of God” (II Cor. 4:4). See also John 14:9, Col. 2:9, John 1:14.

While Jesus will always have the preeminence (Col. 1:18), and be God’s heir (Heb. 1:2), God has purposed that many sons be brought to glory (Heb. 2:10), conformed to the image of His son (Rom. 8:29), themselves counted as heirs of God, joint heirs with Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:17).

In the beginning man was placed in paradise and given dominion over the works of God’s hands. However, Adam and Eve rebelled and fell under the dominion of Satan and sin, plunging mankind and this present creation into a state of death and decay.

God has not, however, abandoned His original intention. In Heb. 2:5 the writer says, “For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak.” If angels are not destined to rule in the new world, who is?

The writer continues with a quotation from Psa. 8 concerning the purpose of man’s creation. Verses 6-8 say, “Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.”

Even though man’s destiny is to rule over the works of God’s hands, it is evident that that destiny is yet to be fulfilled. What we see (that is, the elect see, by revelation) is Jesus who became a man that He might through His own suffering and death bring many sons to glory (verse 10).

By virtue of His becoming a man and overcoming, He is truly our elder brother and a faithful high priest able to deliver us fully from sin and death (verses 11-18, Heb. 7:24-25).

Male and Female

Genesis 1:27 says, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them.” I believe that all of the positive qualities associated with males and females — from strength to tender nurturing — originate in God and are part of His character. Though we speak of God as “Father” and “Him,” He can relate as easily to godly women as He can to men. One of His names in the Old Testament is El Shaddai, “the breasted one” — reflecting His compassion, nurturing love, and readiness to supply needs.

At first Adam was alone and, I believe, possessed all of these qualities. Then God, in His wisdom, brought forth Eve from Adam’s side to be a help and companion to him. That is the order of things for this present age.

In Luke 20, Jesus was asked a hypothetical question by some religious people who didn’t believe in the resurrection or life after death. It was the custom in Israel that if a man died leaving a wife but not having an heir, that his brother was obligated to take her to wife that she might bear a son to be the dead brother’s heir. This was a way to preserve family names and inheritances and speaks to us of God’s concern for the least of His elect that their inheritance is to be preserved (I Pet. 1:4).

They imagined a situation in which seven brothers in turn married the same woman and died. No children were produced and then she died as well. They wanted to know whose wife she would be in the resurrection.

Jesus’ answer is contained in verses 34-36: “And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.”

Sex and marriage pertain only to this world. That fact will undoubtedly make some sad and some glad, but I don’t believe that anyone who “obtains that world” will be disappointed for even a moment in what they find there!

Note that Jesus didn’t say we would be angels, but that we would be equal to them. We will be God’s children, immortal, beyond any need for marriage.

Adoption

Paul uses a word not used by others to describe what God does for His elect: adoption. Eph. 1:5 says, “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”

There were various customs relating to adoption in the Gentile world Paul was sent to. In general, adoption was a means by which a man could bring one not born to him into his family — even a slave if he so chose — ultimately investing him with full legal rights of sonship including inheritance.

That truly is a picture of what God does. The elect are first born into Adam's family, slaves to sin and death and Satan. God, who has known His elect from the foundation of the world, begins by the Spirit to prepare their hearts to receive the word when it comes.

Peter refers to this as "sanctification of the Spirit" (I Pet. 1:2). To sanctify means to set apart. What God does in our hearts sets us apart from other men — not that we deserve it or because of any virtue in us — but because of His own purpose and grace. II Tim:1:9; Titus 3:5; Eph. 3:8-10.

One characteristic of God's elect is an inward fear of God. The scripture calls the fear of God "the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7). If he has no Spirit-taught fear of God a man knows nothing.

The elect are taught of God (John 6:45) such things as will enable them to recognize and receive the voice of the Son of God when it comes. They may go on for years in sin and unbelief, but there is a difference on the inside. Though they are lost sheep, they are still sheep. Other men, goats, without the sovereign inward work of preparation refuse to believe. John 10:26; Matt. 15:24; John 8:47; 6:37, 44; Matt. 25:31-32.

At the proper time God arranges for every lost sheep to hear the Word of God — not just the letter of the Word — but that which is preached by the anointing. The anointing — which is Christ — convicts us of our lost and sinful condition and reveals Christ's full and complete provision for us through the cross.

In time we are brought to true repentance and faith — all of which is a gift of God's grace. The result is that we are "sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:13-14). II Cor. 1:22.

The gift of God's indwelling Spirit is the "earnest" or guarantee of God's intention to finish the job. It is God saying, "This is my child." It is when God imparts His immortal life to us. It is what Peter called "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (I Pet. 1:23).

God's indwelling Spirit, "Christ in you the hope of glory," (Col. 1:27), enables us to recognize that God is our Father, that our hope lies in crying "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15). He is no longer just some great Being we have heard about called God; a new and personal relationship is formed in which we know Him as Father.

Gal. 4:4-7 says, "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."

This “Spirit of His Son,” “the Spirit of adoption,” irrevocably sets our feet on the path to God’s eternal kingdom. This, from our point of view, is the point of no return. There is no going back.

Those Who Fall Away

We observe many who appear to be Christians — perhaps even for years — who then fall away from their apparent faith. In reality, in some hidden area there remained an unconquered heart, what Heb. 2:12 calls “an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.” Though they tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come (Heb. 6:5) through their exposure to Spirit-anointed truth, they were never brought to surrender. In the end unbelief prevailed.

John says of these, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us” (I John 2:19). God, “the Father of spirits,” deals with His own as sons, chastening them when they need it that He might bring forth “the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (Heb. 12:5-11).

Though we may experience weariness and failure along the way, our Father never grows weary or gives up. Is. 40:28-31.

Listen to the words of Psa. 89:28-29 which speak prophetically of Christ: “My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven.” Hallelujah!

We can look in faith to Jesus “the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:1-2), drawing from him the needed grace and strength to finish the race.

Paul specifically identifies “the adoption” with “the redemption of the body” (Rom. 8:23) when the process of bringing us from slavery to full sonship is complete. At that time all vestiges of sin and death will be completely gone from every part of our being. We will be as free to serve God as Jesus Himself. There will be in every part of us a perfect harmony with the Father, His Son, and each other.

In short, we will be fully prepared to assume all of the duties and privileges of a full-grown son in the new creation. It will be ours to rule over and enjoy. God Himself will dwell with us and be our God (Rev. 21:3).

Paradise Regained

Those in Adam, because of sin, are banished from paradise; those in Christ, through His obedience, regain it forever!

Truly, “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18). II Cor. 4:16-18.

Looking unto Jesus, we can endure our cross, despising the shame, because of the joy that is set before us (Heb. 12:2). Like Peter, because of what God has revealed, we are able to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory (I Pet. 1:6-8).

The scriptures are full of great passages such as Rom. 8:28-39 exhorting and encouraging believers concerning our hope in Christ. I believe two in particular are in order here.

Several years ago I became curious about I Pet. 1:13 and I believe the Lord quickened a slightly clearer translation of it: "Therefore, girding up the loins of your mind, and being sober, remain expectant to the end for the grace that is being brought to you by the revelation of Jesus Christ."

We need that revelation as the Israelites needed the manna. Spiritually, we have been called into the wilderness where we need a miraculous provision of spiritual food. The canned-up manna of the past has become corrupted with worms and will not do. There is a fresh ministry of the Spirit that alone will transmit the revelation of Christ relevant to our day and our needs and God's ongoing purpose. God has promised that by this means we will be given the grace needed right down to the end.

It needs to be a matter of prayer that God will provide this needed ministry to the scattered remnant Church. This is the hour for the gathering and forming of Christ's Body and the restoration of the Church. Let's pray to that end asking for grace to find our place in what He is sovereignly bringing to pass.

Perhaps it is fitting that we conclude by once again quoting Paul's words to Timothy in II Tim. 1:7-12: "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

"Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;

"Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

"But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:

"Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.

"For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

"That day" is what our lives are about. "That day" is coming soon. I hope to see you on "that day" when we leave this present evil world forever behind and fully enter immortality!

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