

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE BIBLE

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my wonderful wife, Sharon, whom the Lord blessed me with.

AUTHOR AND INTRODUCTION:

Blair Presson lives in Jackson, Tennessee. He received his bachelor's degree in accounting from Union University in Jackson. Later he received his juris doctor (J.D.) degree from the University of Memphis. Blair is a CPA in Tennessee. He attends the Lighthouse UPC church in Jackson.

There are numerous references and quotations of scripture throughout this material. For purposes of conciseness and clarity in reference to particular issues being discussed some portions of scriptures are omitted this is indicated by the insertion of periods (...) or brackets [] in the materials. I give scriptural reference so that the reader can go back and evaluate the context and any omitted portions of the scripture.

The version of scripture which quoted is the King James Version (KJV) unless otherwise noted.

This book is being published as an e-book to make it more readily available for those who have an interest in the subject matter. Additionally this book is being given away free. However as with all things in life nothing is entirely free, there is always a cost. For that reason if you see some value in this book after reading it, I ask that you consider making a payment to defray the cost incurred in writing and producing the book and in furthering other possible publication as the Lord might subsequently direct. A suggested amount is \$9 though the particular amount is whatever amount you may feel led to give.

This book can be found on the internet currently at:
<http://pressoncpa.com/ConceptualFrameworkBible.aspx>

If you wish to mail a gift or contact me through the regular mail my address is:

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General Discussion: Testaments of Christ

While reading the Bible I asked myself what is the overall purpose, what is the theme the Bible is attempting to convey. For example, I asked, why did God give us the specific Ten Commandments that he did, and not some other or different commandments. So often, at least for myself, when reading the Bible it is easy to get carried away in each story, each commandment, each parable, so that I loose focus of what the last thing I was reading might relate to and even shed light upon in great clarity what I would be reading now. It is important and beneficial sometimes to step back and try to take in the grand view of the forest along with the majesty of the individual trees which comprise it. I also tried to read and study the Bible afresh based on exactly what is contained therein, without bringing the bias of what previously I assumed or what I thought I understood it to say.

I also tried to approach the study with a spirit of meditation and reflection, asking God to speak to my heart and mind anew. I took up the promise, to seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. Study to show yourself approved, and rightly dividing the word of God. Even if you do not agree with everything and every conclusion which I may draw I hope it can challenge and encourage you in your own study of the Word of God. Some areas of the following discussion reflect the conclusion based on my own conscience, and may not reflect your own, and in those areas especially we each are called upon to give our own account for the decisions which we each reach. Yet even when we may sincerely disagree we can, and in fact are called upon to support one another in humility and grace and acknowledge we each stand before the same Lord and Master, who knows and deals with each of us in our individual circumstance.

The entire Bible in the essence of it's focus and teaching centers on one thing the majesty and glory of the one true and living God; his revealing of himself and his purpose, and the relationship of God to his creation, especially mankind; all through JESUS CHRIST.

And beginning at Moses and all the prophets [Jesus] expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. [Luke 24: 27] And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures. [Luke 24: 44-45]

Beginning this discussion I feel it will be beneficial to discuss in a broad sense some items which though not necessarily set forth in detail in scripture, yet do appear in scripture in various contexts and descriptions, the purpose is to assist in some manner to be able to visually conceptualize some of the broad concepts regarding God and man, which by their very nature are not visible.

Image of God: Geometric Representation in Relation to Creation

- A ray represents a line having a fixed beginning point and the arrow mathematically represents infinity or no fixed ending point. A person can most accurately be represented by this symbol each person has a fixed point of beginning and each person's ending can be said to be at death, but in reality each person can and will in fact survive in some state into the future. The individual who in judgment is sentenced to hell is really symbolized as a line segment having a fixed beginning point and a fixed ending (hell), for these individuals though their consciousness, or being, will remain eternal, yet their development and progression will have ended. For the person who moves forward in communion with God in heaven, that person will have the opportunity for greater development and experience, and thus can truly be represented by a ray.
- ↔ A line, is represented has an arrow at each end, representing no fixed beginning point and no fixed ending point. God can be represented in this fashion in that he neither has a beginning nor a set ending point. Both ends of the line proceed out to infinity mathematically. Each end of a line proceeds out and yet never necessarily connects.
- A circle is a much more accurate representation of God than a line is. Though the line does indicate the fact that God neither has a set beginning nor end, it fails to account for the perfectness and unity of God's relation to our understanding of existence. The circle better represents the fact that not only is there no "beginning" and no "end" with God. God is the beginning and the end simultaneously. He was the same whenever we can understand the beginning as existing and will be the same when our understanding of the end arrives, and he is just the same right now, in the present.

Human existence (as represented by a ray above) can be thought of as moving forward through time yet, current existence extends only to the point of the arrow, or where we are right now today. We can look behind us, where we have been and what we have experienced and we can look forward into the future with our plans, projections, and expectations. However we can only affect the future as it occurs by what we do or don't do today. The line itself (extending backwards behind the point) can be thought of as setting our history or the path we have followed to arrive at where we are today.

God's existence symbolized in the form of the circle is completely unique from our own. There is no specific point of the arrow with God. However, at ever point along the circle God is equally present as we even are right now. God can be thought of as occupying what we understand as the "beginning" and the "end" at the same time, and still reside in the "now". God

is in the present with us in our existence just as we ourselves are at any moment in time. Therefore God is able to empathize with our pain, bear our burden, share our joy, and feel jealousy at our idolatry, in the moment even as we experience joys and fears ourselves. Just as he is here, right now, in the moment with us; so he is just as much in tomorrow, and in the past, just as fully as he is in the present. Despite knowing our future paths, where “the line” of our existence will take us, he relates to us just as we are today.

Another difference between the existence of God as compared with human existence is our understanding of space as well as time. Our experience is lineal, in that our “line” is flat, it occupies a defined point in space at a specific period of time. God on the other hand occupies all space at any moment in time just as he occupies each moment, past, present, and future in time simultaneously. God can be thought of as a sphere, as opposed to a flat circle, or a flat line which is what man is best represented by.

There are some very elemental reasons that make trying to equate God to any manner of representation (including geometric) impossible. For one thing is the Bible itself, it states that no man can know God (not even in a most basic geometric representation). However, there is nothing wrong with the attempt to better comprehend and understand God even if we fall utterly short in the effort. The second reason why trying to equate God with a circle is impossible, is that the very definition mathematically. We can not meet the definition in relation to the discussion of God. A circle is a shape with all points the same distance from the center. Thus, according to the very definition we fall short, of being able to limit God as a circle. Since we are unable to fathom the length and breadth of God we fail to ever be able to define the point which would represent the center point of God. All man can do, subject to the limits of our ability to comprehend God is perhaps to only begin to scratch the surface of God. The creation is by its definition and status never in a position to fully comprehend the Creator; or in the context of our discussion not even to comprehend the center point of the creator. The deeper God allows us to proceed into his righteousness, judgment, and grace the more aware we have to become that we can not begin to even scratch God’s surface much less to ever find his center. Despite this fact, for purposes of human understanding I will state that a circle or more accurately a sphere is the most reasonable representation of God.

An ancient Greek philosopher, Empedocles (490-430 B.C.), is the first known person to equate God with the circle. He stated, the nature of God is a circle of which the center is everywhere, and the circumference is nowhere. I would rather state the representation as being a sphere in which the center fills completely and equally the interior of the sphere and of which there is no outside edge.



The next geometric shape I want to address is that of a square, or more accurately, a box. This shape most accurately represents how we can and do understand our own universe, and more broadly even our own existence. As a finite creation each person exists at a particular point in space and in time. In order to identify the location of a specific object (for example using a GPS system) there needs to be a correlation of the object between a series of other fixed known points which

taken together determine the point or location of the object (these fixed points can be thought of as the sides of the box).

The “box” of the finite (as opposed to infinite) existence is and always will be limited, as opposed to that of God as discussed above with the “circle”. We think of human or mortal existence in this manner but I believe that the same principles will apply to our existence at all times. The area of the “box” we occupy today is much more limited than what we will experience once we put off this mortal flesh and put on immortality. But even upon reaching what we define as immortality, there is nothing to say we will still not exist in a single location at any particular point in time. Just as we move through this life in a manner which can be represented by a line, we will continue to follow a line into and through eternity. There is a box a defined limit placed on space, and time, as ordained and established by the will of God for his creation in this existence. The Bible does say that the new earth will not pass away, as this earth and these heavens will. That does not mean that there will be no limit to the existence in the new earth and the new heaven, however, as with all things, the limit and the result of those limits are within the hand of the sovereign and faithful God.

In fact it is possible that there can be various boxes within boxes which comprise “creation”. For example, man as an individual can thought of as a “box”. We then exist within the larger box of earth. Beyond that earth exists within the still larger box which is said to comprise heaven. Heaven itself will eventually open up to a still greater existence or box, which can be defined as the New Heaven and New Earth. What remains constant is that even with the revealing of each larger and more magnificent “box” all these, regardless of the eventual number and grandeur which comprises them, they each and every one still exist within the greater sphere of the infinite God, who created them all before the foundation of the world.

We can only fully experience or comprehend the “box” which we currently exist, that being ourselves. Through experience and knowledge we develop a greater and greater understanding concerning the “box” of this earth, specifically the natural world around us. Finally we have some small cognition of the world “box” which we have not yet entered but are able to attempt to gain understanding concerning. Paul himself says we see through a glass darkly. But eventually that door will be opened and we will begin to experience it with all of our senses, as it were face to face. The box, or boxes, that go beyond that is within the will of the sovereign God to reveal unto us as it pleases him, when we are ready. The Bible states, the Lord will not put more on us that what we are able to bear, that applies to experiences, development, and blessings; as well as trials and tribulation.

Time itself exists within this box of the finite. All the objects within the box relate not only to other objects within the terms of space within the box but also within the time provided. Time is established by God just as space and creation are. Time is how the mortal or rather the finite interacts with itself. All the finite understands and relate to each other and ourselves in the now - the present. Through our wills, our memory, or intellect, we can look back to the past and determine the expected results of specific decisions in the future, yet we can not escape that each and every thing exists right now - in the present - in this “box”.

When we look at the Bible and the various examples given of how God had chosen to represent his communion and where he symbolizes the relation between the creator and the creation, and the infinite and the finite, we are given the temple, as the physical symbol. The oracle in the first (Solomon's) temple was described as square in shape (see I Kings 6: 20). The temple in the kingdom age is also described as square in shape (see Ezek. 42: 16-20). Finally the New Jerusalem is described in shape as a cube (Rev. 21: 16). The Bible clearly gives this shape as the symbol for how God pictures the sphere in which the creator and the creation interact and commune with each other.

The circle or sphere of God exists within (throughout) the box of creation but also outside of it. Using these symbols the creation box can be pictured as being inside the interior of the circle. The eternal extends into and can affect the finite but the finite can not extend beyond its inherent constraints into the eternal. Thus God is present at all places, simultaneously, but he is also at all times, simultaneously. When the Bible says Christ was the lamb slain before the foundation of the world, it shows that God not only had the purpose and mechanism of reconciliation of sinful man to himself established as a plan, but he had implemented and achieved the result of his purpose before the physical world itself was even formed at another point in time. The prophets who gave account of the great tribulation, and even those who give witness to the New Jerusalem and the new earth, were merely through the power of the eternal allowed access to another time just as God himself is currently there, just as he is currently here. Past, present, future, all become one with the eternal God.

One of the challenges of reading prophecy in the Old Testament involves that often the prophets descriptions of time and events may go from a present day situation in the life of a prophet, to some event that might occur a few years or perhaps decades in the future, and then immediately make reference to some event that might not even occur until the end of this present world as we know it, or even beyond that, and then come back without any great distinction being made at all in the writing or tenor of speech in the prophet's writing. What we must remember is that the Bible and prophesy is concerned with describing God's plan and time-line for fulfilling his purpose in relation to creation. As eternal God is not concerned and controlled by the idea of time as we ourselves are. Thus it is the process and development that concerns God and which he desires to reveal to us through prophecy not necessarily the length of time between events, since God is just as present at any point in time as he is present at any physical location, simultaneously.

Another important aspect of God's universality in time as well as space relates to God's presentness. Jesus when he heard of Lazarus being sick knew that he was going to die; in fact he knew Lazarus was going to get sick and die long before he ever became sick. Jesus also knew that he was going to heal Lazarus and raise him from the dead. Yet the Bible says that when he finally did arrive and Mary and Martha came out to greet him, that they were grieving still for their brother. Upon seeing them, the Bible says that Jesus was moved by their sorrow and their grief and that he also moaned for the loss of Lazarus. Despite knowing the end of this story even before the beginning, yet Jesus is still in the moment in all the emotion and sorrow. Jesus shared and experienced the moment just as those around him did. The same principle applies for God's relationship with Israel in the Old Testament and for that matter into the New. He knew of the

sin, the idolatry, the rebellion from his commandments by Israel, yet at the same time he knew of his plan and mercy and grace, and the forgiveness of their iniquity in his love that he would provide. Despite all these conflicting elements relating to his plan for his people and their relation in time to him, yet he looked and dealt with Israel according to where they were at any point in time; whether judging them as a jealous God for their idolatry, or extending deliverance when they cried out to him in their affliction and bondage.

Despite knowing the end from the beginning God exists in the moment, and accepts and judges us according to where we are at the present. Two other examples are Satan and Judas; both these individuals had personal relationship with the eternal God and in the fleshly manifestation of the eternal God, Jesus Christ. Both them are acknowledged by scripture as being known as flawed from the beginning. Satan is described as being a murderer and liar from the beginning. Judas as a thief, yet Jesus called Judas friend, and both them were in intimate communion with the Lord in their own relations, nothing in God's actions toward either of them until each took their own willful action separating themselves from God, indicated that they were forced by God away from him.

Besides the area of omnipresence and omniscience, discussed above the third element of existence of God relates to his omnipotence. This area states that God is all powerful; he is the originator and sustainer of all creation, in both heaven and earth. All things are made by him and for him. This essential fact must never be forgotten. He has established the order and organization of all things. He sets the bounds and limits of all things, and within his sovereign discretion he allows creation its freedom to develop according to his will and plan. In the end he reserves the right to fold up the heavens and earth as an old garment and by himself to make again all things new. God glories in showing forth his sovereign power. The Bible gives countless examples of this fact from the first account of creation, to the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, to the miracles of the life of Christ, until he creates again all things new. In God alone we live, and move, and have our being.

The Bible in discussing God's relation with creation normally draws a correlation to a cloud. The use of a cloud indicates the essence of the eternal in that its presence is seen, and is apparent; yet at the same time it can not be controlled, or held in the physical material sense. Further, God is described as dwelling within the thick darkness of the cloud, thus there is no communion or relationship between the finite and the eternal. It is impossible to relate as part of creation to the eternal creator who resides within the dark places of the cloud. For true communion or relationship to exist the creation must have a way to relate and begin to comprehend its creator, or stated differently; begin to perceive he who resides within the cloud.

As described above the three unique elements which comprise God's existence are omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience. What the Bible does is show how God made a way for the finite creation to recognize and relate with the infinite.

General Overview of the Three Distinct Areas of Revelation of God's Relations to Man.

Once we begin to understand the differences between God and man we must ask ourselves certain questions. 1. What is the essence of God's character that made him desire a creation and to directly relate with it once created? 2. What method has God elected to relate to his creation, specifically man? 3. How does God manifest himself to creation?

Christ describes himself in scripture as the "living water". This description is highly illustrative in a number of ways. As previously discussed in the general conceptualization of God, water has its natural shape as a circle, and more accurately a sphere. Just as water has three elements which comprise it and three distinct manifestations, the Bible gives us three primary revelations of the one God. These three "revelations" of God can be broken down into general categories of character, manifestation, and relationship. Each of these revelations will be set forth briefly below and will be discussed in greater detail later.

The composition of water is chemically described as H²O. There are three required elements which all must be present to form water. Two of the elements are hydrogen and one is oxygen. The Bible lists three primary elements which can be said to comprise the character of God. Two of these elements tend to be viewed as so close that they are often thought of as comprising a single element. The third element on initial consideration appears to exist completely separate and perhaps even in opposition to the first two. The first two elements are righteousness and judgment, the final element is grace/love. Love appears to have no direct correlation or relation to righteousness and especially judgment. However upon deeper thought and reflection it is apparent that God in the form of his revealed character and purpose as set forth in the Bible only exists in the presence of all three. Love without the element of judgment is not true love at all but rather can be thought of as only enablement (in the psychological sense) or spineless appeasement. Thus to really love something or someone especially if that love is to be thought of as truly righteous it requires the element of judgment, that actions and attitudes have consequences. Similarly righteousness must have the element of love [grace] present; otherwise righteousness with only judgment results in mere self-righteous vindictiveness. Love thus allows righteousness to fully develop and allows the element of judgment to most fully achieve its proper role and purpose that of protecting the validating the role of righteousness.

Second the revelation of the manifestation of God is highly appropriate related to the discussion above of the relation of the infinite within the realm of the finite. Thus we look at how water is understood in our physical world. Water can take the form of a liquid, a gas, or a solid. Yet regardless of the manifestation the water takes, its character and nature remain constant. Thus God has chosen to manifest his presence and to relate to creation over time as revealed through the Bible in three manifestations. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit yet each manifestation is that of the one eternal God. This will be discussed much more in detail later. Unlike water which changes its manifestation based on the surrounding environment; God uses each divinely established manifestation of himself to his creation to change the environment and relationship in which the creator and creation relate to each other according to God's sovereign will over time.

The third sphere of relations set forth relates to the divine sphere of human relations and within each of these there is also the relation and reconciliation between man and God. The

three established spheres of human relation are (1) the individual, made in the image of God; (2) Family; as set forth through marriage and family relationship; and (3) Government, the kingdom of God. God desires a unity of relationship with man in all three of these areas. Strength of relationship that can only come through free choice based on love. This relationship is strengthened by temptation, trials, and tribulation in our lives binding man to God, as by fire.

This threefold level of relation and the intent (necessity) of unity within each is set forth in scripture:

And if a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand, And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan rise up against himself and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end. [Mark 3: 24-26]

In the following verse Jesus says that the physical marriage/family relations are to find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ and the church. “For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.” [Mark 3: 35]

God could have chosen to relate to his creation in any form or fashion that he had desired, but he chose a specific method of relation and this method was for a specific purpose. What the Bible does is to describe the will, purpose, and plan of God for his reconciliation of sinful man to a holy God.

Overview of the Concept of Government as Devolved from God.

Government reflects much the same progression as man himself, in the Bible. Just as man is created in the image of God, human government also reflects in the area of the natural the existing structure of authority that also exists in heaven itself.

The Bible in reference to the Lord constantly makes mention of his “throne” in heaven. There is a hierarchy in the spiritual just as in the earth, which in fact precedes the existence of government on earth. The Bible is also clear that the character of government as a divine institution will continue throughout eternity. See Ps. 9: 4,7.

Government represents the concept of order, God himself believes in the concept of order, which is reflected in the very essence of all his creation, beginning with the spiritual and continuing to the very physical universe itself. When we look at the universe around us, there is basic order inherent in all things, from the laws of nature; to man himself there is a natural desire to order extending even into extended human relations which are secured through government.

Scriptures set forth the proper role, purpose, and established function of government both on earth and in heaven.

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the

power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works but to the evil for hie is a minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil; be afraid, for he is a minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake... they are god's ministers attending continually upon this very thing. [Rom. 13: 1-6]

The preceding scripture sets forth the perfect plan and purpose of government. Man had a perfect purpose in God's eyes prior to his sin; following sin that perfect plan was set aside, until God could once again reconcile man unto himself through Christ. The same situation is present for human government. Government is administered by sinful man and therefore is failed in its operation, in varying degrees, to the same extent man is failed, some more some less, by their very nature. Just as no man is perfect in himself before the sight of God, likewise no human government is perfect in operation in the sight of God.

Satan's own sin of rebellion against God came forth from his spirit and attitude of pride. He sought to raise up his own position within the context of God's own divinely established order, or government, to be equal with God. The Bible says God will share his glory with no one. Satan was eventually able to convince a third of the angels in heaven to follow him as their leader. Government becomes a method of testing of a people, as well as angels, we must submit ourselves our pride our own will to that of God, even if we do not understand why something is happening, or even agree with it. We must accept we are under authority and just as importantly to have faith that he whose authority we are under is more than able to protect and keep us in whatever situation we are in, and to follow him where ever he leads. Faith comes from an understanding of who is over us, and his commitment to keep us regardless of the circumstances around us.

The children of Israel rejected the form of government (theocracy) initially set forth by God for the children of Israel when they came out of Egypt. Instead they decided that they wanted to have a king over them like the other nations around them. In response to this request God gave them what they desired, and described how the government would operate in actual practice when directly under control of sinful man.

... This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you; He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots... he will appoint him captains over thousands; and captains over fifties, and will set them to... reap his harvests, and to make his instruments of war... he will take your fields, and your vineyards... even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give them to his officers and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your assess, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep; and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king... [I Sam. 8: 11-18]

There is a responsibility of government which is to provide order and stability for those whom it rules over. Judgment in support of righteousness for those over whom it exercises authority is the purpose of government. Judgment takes the form of selecting rulers, and judges which will faithfully execute their offices and the laws which are passed and administered to support those purposes. The government in supporting these purposes creates a situation of peace for the persons comprising the state, so that they themselves can seek after righteousness in their personal lives, and enjoy peace in their personal lives and with their families.

... it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted... Open thy mouth, judge righteously and plead the cause of the poor and needy. [Ps. 31: 4-5, 9]

As already mentioned, government, like man himself, often falls short of the divinely established position and responsibility imposed on the institution. In such a case God as sovereign of earth and all that is therein may change government, through the actions of man. He takes away earthly power from one person or group and can award it to another as it pleases him. In Israel he took the throne of Israel from the house of Saul and gave it to the house of David, because of Saul's sin as king. The same way that the nation of Israel itself was divided in two parts when he established Jeroboam to take ten of the twelve tribes of Israel with him, and separated the formerly unified kingdom which had been passed on to Rehoboam from his father Solomon.

God's perfect plan for man is fulfilled historically through the use of government. Kings like individual men are used by God, whether they consciously submit their ways to God, or whether God establishes their path and guides their ways without their ever acknowledging or even knowing that fact. God will be magnified in all things, in heaven and in earth, that also includes being magnified in and through government, either in mercy and blessing or finally in judgment of those governments and of their people.

By me kings reign and princes decree judgment. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth. I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me. [Prov. 8: 15-17] The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water; he turneth it whithersoever he will. Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD pondereth the hearts. To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice. [Prov. 21: 1-3] If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a providence, marvel not at the matter; for he that is higher than they. [Eccl. 5: 8] The LORD standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge the people. The LORD will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people, and the princes thereof; for ye have eaten up the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses. [Isa. 3: 13-14]

The Lord uses government for judgment upon his own people for chastisement and for testing according to his perfect plan and purposes. Government can be used to judge or test an

entire nation, Israel; or group, the church; or a particular individual, Christ himself, in furtherance of God's sovereign will. It is important to remember that when God uses an unjust or unrighteous instrument, whether an individual or government, to test his elect, that God will eventually judge that which had before acted as an instrument of his plan. God will judge that instrument itself fully, just as at the time it was used as an instrument to fulfill God's plan. God will not forget the suffering of his people, and those who caused the suffering, even if that suffering was itself justified at the time according to the righteous judgment of God, because of the sins of his people, or otherwise according to God's will and plan.

O Assyrian the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against a hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge to take the spoil... When the LORD hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion... I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria... shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith... [Isa. 10: 1-15]

Before we leave the general discussion of government it is important to understand that the principle of government, and of authority, is of critical importance in relation to a full understanding of God and developing the attitude which is acceptable to God. A spirit of faith and appropriate actions is predicated on an appreciation of proper order and authority established in heaven and as reflected in the institutions upon earth.

For I [the Centurion] also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one. Go, and he goeth... When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him... I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel. [Luke 7: 8-9]

When you look at the position and experience of the centurion his life was based on obedience to those above him, following their direction with the faith that the power that sent him into a situation was sufficient to provide for him to achieve what he had been sent to accomplish. Likewise he had confidence that what he commanded those under him to do would be completed as he directed. Both those above were authorized and capable of achieving the purpose which they set forth for themselves, and those sent as their representatives acted upon that same authority, in full confidence and belief in the power of the structure which they were a part. As Christians we are charged, but also authorized, to exercise the promises put in our hands by God's word.

Israel and even the disciples, who were with Jesus, constantly upon entering the storm or the trial, thought that the Lord was not aware of their need and would not provide and would let them die. Peter when he was called by Christ out of the ship, stepped out by faith, but then began looking around and not focusing upon Jesus who called him out (thereby giving him the power by that calling to walk on the water) and immediately began to sink. The centurion had experience and knowledge that if application was made to one of high authority within the structure that even if it would be impossible for himself, once the authority was given, that whatever was commanded would be fulfilled because of the position and authority of the one

from whom the order came. All that was necessary was that the command be given and all else would, by whatever means, be accomplished.

The question always tends to arise what is the scriptural type of government which Christians should seek after. The short answer is that there is no perfect form of government which the Bible commands Christians to adopt. The Jewish law sets forth the original theocratic government structure for Israel coming out of Egypt. During the kingdom age, Christ will come back to earth and will rule with righteousness. The physical kingdom of Israel will be exalted in all the earth, God will be magnified in his people Israel. He will fulfill his promises to Israel after the flesh during this period. The Bible does not say that every other government in the earth, even during the kingdom age, must conform to the structure set forth for Israel. More than the particular method of structuring of the government, the issue which is important to God is the atmosphere created by the government, creating justice and equity among all the people, and establishing righteousness and honor toward the God who ordained all government.

The same question arises in the associated areas of what is the proper economic, taxation, and overall social, and cultural systems which government should encourage and foster. The answer to this is the same as that which relates proper structure of government; all things must focus and turn toward Christ. God gives every king and ruler liberty to establish the particular way in all these various areas of government operate in accordance with the ruler's conscience once they approach the question with a heart that is itself tender and reconciled unto God in righteousness and grace. See further related discussion in New Heaven/ New Earth.

FOCUS OF THE BIBLE:

The Bible can be broken down into four general areas of focus which other areas touch upon and to one degree or another relates to. In fact these areas themselves constantly relate between each other. These four main areas which the Bible focuses can be broken down as follows: 1. Choice: Free will and the effects thereof; 2. God's revealing (showing forth) of himself in Glory, Grace, Righteousness and Judgment; 3. Process of Salvation; expressed by the reconciliation of the relationship between God and man; 4. Love.

1. Choice: Free will and the effects thereof

Without the capacity of choice there can not be righteousness or sin. It is this freedom which gives rise to judgment, both for rewards and punishment. What the Bible does is set down a history of man's choice in relation to God and his commandments. The Bible also sets down the history of God's choice in relation to man, and all creation. God's choice is set forth in the concepts of righteousness, judgment, and grace. Man's choice is to accept God and to follow after righteousness as it is revealed unto him, or to follow after what is right in his own sight and the things which benefit himself without regard to those around him.

a. God's Choice: All things Made by Him and For Him.

When we discuss choice and the effects therefrom we are usually concerned with the results from man's choice. However, the very first choice comes from God. It is God who created heaven and earth. See Acts 17: 24-25. He made all things as it pleased him. Rev. 4: 11, states that all things are created for God's pleasure, to give him all praise and glory for which he is worthy.

All too often we think that God created the world for us and for our benefit. To some extent that statement can be said to be true. But the more accurate statement is that God created all things that we could commune with him, in a spirit of love. God created us for a purpose, which is to love him, to worship him, and to show forth his glory, his righteousness and his grace to the rest of his creation.

Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD's, thy God, the earth also; with all that therein is. Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day. Circumcise therefore the foreskin, of your heart and be no more stiff-necked.
[Deut. 10: 14-16]

"Man" is created in the image of God. Yet not all men are chosen by God. The Bible is filled with examples of what are called "vessels of honor" and "vessels of dishonor". Not all men are given a heart which, chooses to feel after God, to seek after that which extends beyond

the momentary gratification of this world and this life and seek for something which has an everlasting foundation.

The Bible can be thought of as a history of God's choice, in showing grace, in showing love and maintaining a relationship even in failure, sin, and in judgment, with a people. This relationship began in the O.T. with Adam, and progressed with Seth, until reaching Noah, and eventually being revived again specifically with Abraham. Up until the time of Abraham, God expressed his relationship in terms of specific individuals, who sought after God, or who found favor with God.

God chose to establish a special relationship with Abraham, not only with him individually, but also with his children. This does not mean that God ignored the rest of humanity and did not relate to other individuals besides Abraham, but the purpose of the Bible is as a narrative, it sets forth a testimony of God's faithfulness and for his particular plan of development and relationship with man, beginning in the flesh and then continuing to expand and reveal the nature of that desired relationship extending to the heart and spirit. The Bible shows that various other individuals also had knowledge of the same God from whom Abraham received the promise. The first person, Melchisedec is mentioned in Genesis as the king of Salem. He is described as both a king but also as a high priest of the living God. In fact it says that Abraham gave tithes unto Melchisedec upon returning from a battle. In another instance, another individual, Balaam is described as a person who was hired by certain kings to curse Israel when they came out of Egypt and were preparing to enter the Promised Land. The account of Balaam shows he had a personal understanding of the living God. He would not go beyond what God would communicate with him, regarding blessings and curses, in his relationship with the kings which hired him. However Balaam used the relationship with God for his own purposes (for wealth) as opposed to a spirit of true love unto God. When Balaam could not curse the people of Israel, he instructed the kings on how to cause the people of Israel to sin against God, and thereby weaken their relationship with their Lord.

Once Israel had grown to such a large number, the Bible states that God again reaffirmed his promise, originally made with Abraham, and confirmed with his family, but now extended that relationship with Israel as a nation. Israel had a national character which over time has shown through scripture itself to be based on the flesh, though a stiffnecked (unbelieving) people, yet God has time and time again shown himself faithful unto the nation of Israel. He will ultimately fulfill all the promises given in scripture of not only deliverance and restoring of the nation of Israel to its land but the lifting up and glorying of the earthly kingdom of Israel in all the Earth.

Why did God choose Israel? Why has Israel suffered, the trials and tribulations, which they have throughout history? The short answer is because of choice. As described above God chose who he desired to develop a relationship with. At the same time he knew the spirit and attitude of the children of Abraham, their sin, their unrepentance, and their lack of faith and understanding of the spiritual nature of the promises of God, especially concerning the Messiah, Christ. God nevertheless chose to use Israel, and their failure as a people, and a nation, to bless the whole world in that he turned his face unto those who had been in darkness, and showing

them a great light. At the same time, God blinded the understanding of Israel concerning the nature of Jesus Christ. God will according to his own plan and purpose, again open the understanding and reconcile Israel as a people and nation again unto himself, in the fullness of his truth.

The church itself is an assembly of people called out of darkness unto the light of God. A people who have accepted the call of God as received in their individual hearts. Upon accepting Christ, we are become spiritually part of the body of Christ, just as we are ourselves made new creatures through Christ in our individual lives, attitudes, and behaviors. The work of God through Christ also has the intent to make us a family, to bind us together through Christ, in love and faith, to one another. God's plan is to reconcile the church in the spirit with the fleshly promise of Israel (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the prophets and other righteous of Israel) into one people, representing the Kingdom of God. God's final plan and purpose is to be fulfilled in the kingdom of God, which will represent the final unity as one person, one family, and one government all in unity through Christ the head of the body, our heavenly Father, Bridegroom, and King.

God chose us for a specific plan and purpose. We are his creation, in him we live and move and have our being. Without him we literally are nothing. He desired man to be a helpmate, someone to commune with, for that purpose he created us in his own image, with the same basic character which God himself possesses. The basic element of this image of God is that of the freedom to choose. See Isa. 41: 8-9.

God's desire is to develop a special relationship with man which he did not provide for any of his other creation. God chose to establish a process of taking a people unto himself in a special relationship, a relationship based on a two-way choice: First, the choice of God who through grace calls a people out of the unsaved world. Grace is in its essence the opportunity to hear the call of God in their heart. Second, the hearer accepts the call and chooses to follow God in love and faith. What exists is a mutual choice, like in a marriage, both the bride and groom, become one in spirit and in body, because each is drawn to the other in love. They choose to be bound to one another.

b. Man's Choice: Basic Right and Responsibility of Accepting the Sovereign God.

God has given each person a particular and unique opportunity, that opportunity is life itself. In conjunction therewith, God bestows upon each person regardless of their situation and circumstances, the freedom to choose, this choice is to follow and accept God or to reject him and seek after their own way. Along with rights allowed by God there is the responsibility imposed upon each person for the way our rights are exercised and the decisions we make related to the rights given to us.

The first and primary right, and responsibility, given to each person is the freedom of choice and to make our own decision regarding our relationship to God, and to those around us.

What choice we make will affect how God in turn relates and deals with us, either under grace or under God's standard of righteousness and judgment.

God has placed great emphasis upon the concept of "faith" in the relationship between the creation and the creator. It pleased God that each individual will have to step out and leave what they know, or rather think we know; and seek after and submit ourselves to a God, who we feel calling unto our hearts, even if we are not completely sure where that call will eventually lead us.

Faith is the basis upon which we make our choice in the most basic sense. It is this willingness to step out, to make a decision, to forsake our old ways and paths based on experiencing the touch of God on our lives after hearing his word. It is faith which justifies us, it is faith which gives glory to God and which God takes pleasure in. Like Abraham we hear the voice of our LORD calling us out unto a land we have never seen as we seek and follow him in love, even as Ruth followed Naomi, knowing God will never forsake us. Our faith becomes strengthened by experience, trials, and even tribulations.

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve... but as for me and my house we will serve the LORD. [Josh. 24: 15]

... Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death. [Jer. 21: 8]

For they are impudent children and stiffnecked I do send thee unto them, and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD God... whether they will hear or whether they will forebear... yet shall they know that there hath been a prophet among them. [Ezek. 2: 4-5]

Righteousness and sin each stem from the root of choice. The "original sinner" was Satan himself who sinned when he desired to promote himself in pride against the majesty and sovereignty of God. Satan sinned when he desired to magnify and exalt himself as opposed to his Lord. His sin was pride and self-centeredness which lead to the final outward manifestation of sin in rebelling against the sovereign God. Thus even before "original sin" in the form of Adam and Eve's transgression there was sin. The nature of the inherent freedom which God gives to all his higher creatures, man and angels, both created in the image of God is self-awareness which can lead to self-centeredness and pride. The angels were created to serve, minister to, and worship God. At the same time they have the inherent right to accept their role and purpose, or to reject it. Just as with man, the end result of rejecting the righteousness of God is judgment.

The first recorded sin (of man) was the eating of the tree of knowledge. What was the sin? Was it the eating itself? The Bible says it is not the things itself that the mouth eats that defiles, but rather than which comes from the heart and mind that defiles the person. The essence of the thing itself, "knowledge" was not sin either. The Bible encourages us to study, to seek after knowledge, to knock and it shall be opened.

The sin came before ever eating the fruit; it was the desiring after that which had already been commanded as forbidden. Sin originates in the heart, it occurred at the desiring after that which was commanded that was not to be partaken of. What was important to God was not the thing itself, the fruit, but rather that man in faith and love would honor God's commandment to abstain. The sin of man, just as with Satan, was pride, self-centeredness, love of self more than the love of God. The actual act of eating the fruit was only the final outward manifestation of the sin that had occurred in the heart, "keep thy heart with all diligence..." [Prov. 4: 23]

The seed of sin, at least the potential for sin, rests in the fact that being made in the image of God, we are given the right to choose, to follow God his commandment, by faith, in love of him, in trust; or we may choose to seek after our own pride, lust, desires, and unrighteousness. God's judgment is not simultaneous with the origination of the sin in the heart. Judgment came to Adam and Eve not immediately upon the sin (in the mind) rather it came based on the act of eating that which was forbidden, the outward act itself.

2. God's revealing (showing forth) of himself in Glory, Grace, Righteousness and Judgment

God established a plan, a progression, a revelation, of himself to his creation, but especially unto man. God desires to be, and in fact will be, glorified in his power, righteousness, and grace. God is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. Therefore before the beginning of creation, he had already determined what was after the end, and everything that is between. God knows the flow of history; he fills all time and space equally. He already knew the character of each individual, each family, and each government. What God glorifies in is working all things to the pleasure of his own will. The plan and purpose God established before the world was created will be fulfilled. But God has also chosen to work and show forth his glory in a certain order, and chronology. See the following scriptures, Hos 6: 6 and Ezek 34: 31. The Bible constantly shows and emphasizes the fact, that within God's order, there are established times and seasons, for all things. The natural world reflects this fact through the seasons themselves.

God has revealed himself progressively as to his character, purpose, and identity over the process of time. All the names for God, as given to the Jews, reveal different aspects of his glory, personality, his righteousness, as the sovereign Lord. Next God revealed himself as the savior and redeemer of all mankind from our sins, in grace, through making himself flesh in Christ Jesus. See John 3:36, John 10:30, John 14:17-12. The Holy Ghost is revealed as the comforter, the spirit of God, given to those who accept Christ in his sovereignty; the power and spirit living and working in our individual lives giving us power to overcome the flesh. The entire Bible, from the Old Testament through the New, testifies to one undeniable fact, that there is only one God.

The law acted as God's revealing of himself in righteousness. The Ten Commandments, after the flesh, served as the highest revelation of the relationship of man with God, and of man to each other. They were given by God himself and placed on tables of stone. They were followed by man through each person's own effort to fulfill the requirements of the law through the flesh and the spirit. Failure under the law was inevitable because of the character of man

himself, but a way of forgiveness was also established under the law through sacrifice and the shedding of blood. Upon receiving the Ten Commandments, the natural inclination of sinful man was to expand upon it and add their own laws, ordinances, regulations, and traditions, so that over time the initial intent of the law became bound up in legalism and formalism; and became nothing more than the justification of man to man, based on their outward works. God then revealed himself in Christ as the fulfillment of the law. Christ became our justification and he reconciled us to God through himself. The sin of man was taken upon himself, and by his own blood he paid the price for our sins as required by God through the law. Through Christ the law is no longer confined to tables of stone, but rather written on the fleshly tables of our heart.

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow... [Isa. 1: 18]

For everything there is a season. God himself has established what the time and limits for each season are. There is a season of law, to follow the commandments without question in faith; there is a season of grace, where we have an advocate with the Father where we can repent and have confidence that we can find forgiveness; finally we will have judgment. Once one season passes unto the next, according to the plan established by God, there is no returning and going back. For that reason it is incumbent upon each person to make the most of each season, especially in this time of grace, because once judgment arrives we will each stand alone, based on the choices we have made before that time.

... a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment. Because to every purpose there is time and judgment. [Eccl. 8: 5-6]

3. Process of Salvation. Reconciliation of relationship between God and man.

Salvation is set forth as a continuing process of revelation (development towards God's ultimate plan of perfection). God desires to have a chosen people, a peculiar people, a people separated unto himself, to serve him, to abide with him, in fellowship and communion with him, in righteousness and judgment (as kings) and in worship and praise (as priests) unto him. God's ultimate plan/desire is to call unto himself a bride whom he created and whom he has redeemed (after sin) again unto himself in love. The bride likewise has loved and chosen Christ, as the groom, through repentance and obedience to the salvation plan. See Jer. 31:31-34, Romans chapter's 10 and 11, II Cor. 3:7, Acts 2: 38.

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 to us the word of reconciliation. Now 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. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. [II Cor. 5: 18-21]

The process of salvation began with Israel, but God's plan for ultimate reconciliation with man and salvation, was predicated on Christ, and his sacrifice. God's promise was first given to Israel if they would serve him under the terms of the law, then he would be their salvation. However Israel constantly fell short of the requirements of the law, and sought after their own imaginations, and served other gods. Christ became the final and perfect propitiation for our sins; he fulfilled the law in that he gave himself as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. Jesus served not only to reconcile Israel unto God but all the world. Israel, as a nation, rejected Christ; and through this rejection, salvation was extended unto the gentiles, as prophesied in scripture.

I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people. Rom. 10:20-21, see also Isa. 65:2

Salvation was revealed, through Christ, in a form and fashion and at a time established by God. All things are made for the glory and honor of God. We are created to give glory and honor and praise to the God of our salvation. As with a lot of issues which arise in our own lives sometimes we don't understand why things happen the way they do, what the purpose may be, and why something didn't happen differently. The end answer to all these types of questions is that God works out all things according to his own will, plan, and purpose. What God does give us is the promise that all things work for the good of those who love him. That promise is what we are commanded to hold on to. In this particular instance however, the Bible does give us some clarification regarding God's plan for providing salvation the way he did. God knows that the heart of man always looks to justify himself in himself. The Bible also says that it is God who is to be glorified in all things, and especially in our salvation. God gave man the opportunity to justify himself through his own efforts in the flesh to keep the law; and be without sin. Man's failure to live up to the standards of the law, both in the heart and in conduct, became the basis for providing a means of salvation through God's own grace, but also of judgment.

Even every one that is called by my name; for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him... Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD and my servants whom I have chosen; that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he; before me there was no god formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD... therefore ye are my witnesses saith the LORD, that I am God... This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise... I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. [Isa. 43: 7-26]

That no flesh should glory in his presence. [I Cor. 1: 29]

... In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee... [Isa. 49: 8]

God manifest himself to his creation from before the beginning of creation of heaven and earth in Christ. Before being made flesh and revealed as Jesus Christ, a veil was upon the knowledge of man and all creation (angels), and we could only relate to Him in his position of authority, power, majesty, and Lordship. When he became flesh and purchased our salvation he condescended so we could call upon him as our personal savior, our heavenly father, and our friend. Through eternity he will dwell among us with an intimate and personal relationship (New Heaven and New Earth).

4. Love: As moving force behind each of the other previous revealed focuses of the Bible

Love is the basis upon which all the relationship of God and creation, and especially man, relate. From the very beginning God's attitude toward all his creation was that it was good. We exist because God loved us from the very beginning. God created us in love, and he gave us the freedom of choice so that we could love him in return. Faith as already stated is the basis for our justification and is predicated upon love. God has revealed himself in glory and in his manifest character is to draw us closer to himself in love. He wants us to magnify him, praise him, and follow him in love because of who he is. Grace is the fullest expression of God's love toward us that in our sin, God still loved us. The love of God made the process of salvation and reconciliation possible between a Holy God and sinful man, through Christ Jesus. God loves righteousness and judgment, and when we are reconciled to God with a proper heart we also naturally will love righteousness and judgment, and its perfect expression set forth in the Word of God.

Our Attitude Toward God and God's Word

Man's attitude toward God is expressed in our attitude toward God's "Word" (law). The further our heart is from God the less appealing/desirous is God's word to our heart.

1. Highest: David was a man after God's own heart. I Sam. 13: 14; Acts 13:22. God's word was a "JOY" to David it was a "honey" to him. See I Chron. 29:9; Ps. 42: 1-2; Ps.104:34; Ps. 119: 97, 103, 174; Ps. 143: 6; Jer. 15:16 Meditate upon the word of the Lord. Ps. 1:2; Ps. 63:1-7; Josh. 1:8
2. Lower: Solomon asked God for wisdom. God gave it to him. His focus was on earthly wisdom / knowledge. He was more focused on this life and world, not so much on God and his word. Still Solomon recognized the importance of God's

word, as it related to this life and to eternity. Solomon, God's Word was the "duty" of man. Eccl. 12:13; see also Deut. 17: 18-20.

3. Lowest: People/Prophets disregarded the word of the Lord. They make God's word whatever they want it to be. They turn the word of God into a lie to please themselves. To this people God's word is a burden. These people God forsakes and will cast out of his presence. Jer. 23:33-40, Mat. 23:23-28, Jude 1:10-13 See also Legalism/Formalism.

All through history as recorded in the Bible, God is constantly reaching out and revealing himself to those, who are reaching out and seeking to know him. Further, God was reaching out in mercy grace towards those who may not have even desired to know God, yet God was attempting to draw his chosen people, Israel, back to him. That same process continues today.

Each individual stands in their own relation to God. We are the custodian of our own heart, soul, mind, and attitude. How we develop those facets of our character will control how we relate to God, but also to our fellow man. Just as growing a plant takes time, effort, and dedication. The same applies to our lives. Whatever it is that we truly love will be that which we feed and nourish and see develop in our lives. Whether it be good or evil. Thus whatever is in our heart and attitude will bear fruit to one extent or another in our flesh, or in other words, have some outward manifestation. The same principle is also applied if we look at our lives and do not like the fruit which we have been bearing; it is our responsibility to change our heart, mind, and attitude to begin the process of changing the fruit which our life is bringing forth. It is through salvation and reconciliation with God that we are given the ability to change our heart, and to get rid of the weeds which are choking our hearts and keeping us from being who and what we know we should be.

The way of the just is uprightness, thou most upright dost weigh the path of the just. Yea in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea with my spirit within me will I seek thee early; for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn thy righteousness. [Isa. 26: 7-9]

Praise ye the LORD. Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments... unto the upright there appeareth light in the darkness, he is gracious, and full of compassion and righteous... the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD... He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honor... [Ps. 112]

The progression or rather the regression of this relationship with God is most clearly set forth in an analysis of three generations of the kings of Israel themselves.

King David is described as a man after God's own heart. His heart and soul from a boy was turned unto God. As king he continued to love righteousness and seek after judgment. Many of the Psalms themselves were written by David. When David sinned he recognized it, acknowledged it, and repented. His son Solomon also had a relationship with God. In fact God allowed him to request anything he desired and he would give it. Solomon to his credit asked the Lord for wisdom to help him to judge the people as king. God granted this request, along with giving him peace and wealth for his kingdom. Yet unlike his father, Solomon's own heart was not inclined toward a desire for a personal relationship with God. His wisdom focused more on this world, and the things of this life. Yet despite that he understood the word of God's place and importance both dealing with the things of this life, and for eternity. Though Solomon never turned away from the God of his father, yet because of the many wives which he had taken, he allowed them to bring the worship of other gods and idols into Israel and in fact worshiped them himself. Solomon's son was Rehoboam, he had no love or personal understanding of God beyond what might benefit him in the present. He followed after his own desires, with no desire to seek after the will of God, for himself or for his people. He led Israel into idolatry and away from the very God his grandfather desired after with all his heart.

Read Ps. 119 as a summary of Righteousness, in the heart, mind, soul, and attitude that is pleasing unto God. "I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes, I will not forget thy word... thy servant did meditate in thy statutes. Thy testimonies also are my delight, and my counselors... I have chosen the way of truth; thy judgments have I laid before me... Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law, yea I will observe it with my whole heart... Behold I have longed after thy precepts; quicken me in thy righteousness." [Ps. 119: 15-40]

Our attitude toward God is reflected in our relation to the word of God, and his law. The closer we come to God the less of a burden God's word is to our heart and mind. In fact the word of God becomes our joy and strength. The further our heart is from God the more our spirit and attitude rebels against being subject to anything that is foreign to what our heart desires; or which our mind is not in agreement with. That is why it is a "love" that is required of God. When you truly love something and specifically someone then there is no burden in doing what you know they desire and want, when two are in agreement there is no burden placed on either party. The salvation experience is to bring us in communion and reconciliation with God. We who were before alienated from God in our sin, now through Christ we are reconciled; in that we take on the spirit of Christ in ourselves.

Praise, glory, and honor are what God desires from his chosen people. Whatever a person truly loves, then there is little problem when discussing that area with them to get them to express abundant praise, glory and honor. If you are talking about someone you love, the feelings flow naturally to the surface. The same happens for any subject which the person cares about deeply and is close to their heart whether it is an idea (philosophy, ideology, or sports team) or an inanimate object (car, stamps, or money). God placed this commitment and desire and devotion within the heart of every person, the question becomes, in what direction this focus will be turned. God's will and desire

is for his people who he calls unto himself to turn that innate natural love within each of them toward him; as each person is unique in the way they express this love in their heart for whatever the object of that love is. So he delights in that same variety of expression of love, which is directed towards him. The Bible states that God will receive all praise, glory and honor. The question is whether we will give it to him or someone else will. The angels also give praise and glory to God, but that is part of their defined role and purpose. God glories in receiving praise and worship from a people whom he has chosen, but who have themselves chosen him. Through this relationship all God's other creation, angels and other principalities and powers in the world to come will glorify and magnify God based on this relationship of love which he has with his redeemed bride.

God has a Perfect Plan of Development (Revelation):

God has a perfect objective for man and for our relationship with him. See I Cor. 15: 46-50. One of the things God takes the most glory in, as expressed consistently through scripture, is how he moves through a systematic process of development and continued revelation. One of God's methods of testifying of himself is through the beauty and order of the heavens and earth itself. The structure of the world speaks to an innate presence of a creator. By the same method God all throughout scripture has a natural progression which he moves through. He begins with the rudiments of the flesh; he then shows a higher reality and revelation in the spirit and heart and upon the earth. Finally God will actualize his final plan and objective in its ultimately contemplated majesty to be fulfilled in the New Heaven and New Earth.

The secret things belong unto the LORD our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and our children for ever, that we may do all the words of the law. [Duet. 29: 29]

1. Temple. (I) the earthly original temple of Solomon. (II) The Kingdom Age (Millennium) Temple - representing earthly perfection (III) The New Jerusalem (ultimate perfection).

The temple as established in the O.T. especially is a place of sacrifice and of communion with God. The method of sacrifice (sin offering) is set forth in Lev. 4:1-12. Sacrifice in the O.T. made communion with God possible, however it was not able of itself to accomplish the remission of the people's sin before God. From the very beginning the temple relationship emphasized more and more the outward aspects of sacrifice and less and less the communion intended between God and man. The reason for this is that from the very start the heart of the people of Israel was focused upon the world and not upon the personal relationship between a people and their God. Thus they took hold upon the outwardly fleshly manifestations of temple worship and sacrifice while ever more abandoning the internal relationship, thus Israel upon being delivered from captivity in Egypt was quick to follow idolatry and forsake the true worship of God.

Even though Israel, as a people, continued to focus on abiding by the formal, legalistic abiding by the law, and concentrating on sacrifice themselves as the basis of pleasing God through those offerings; yet the Bible on numerous occasions shows God's will and desire for relationship with his people extended far beyond that. Time and time again in scripture, the priests, the prophets, and the kings of Israel pointed the people towards righteousness, which sacrifice only symbolized, and without the correct heart and attitude attached with the outward demonstration, the sacrifice itself was without merit in the eyes of God. Even when the people ignored this message God nevertheless was constantly calling his people back to him in mercy and grace.

... ye rulers of Sodom... ye people of Gomorrah... to what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? ... I am full of burn offerings... I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs... bring no more vain oblations unto me; the new moons, and Sabbaths... wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, let us reason together saith the LORD, though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow... If ye be willing and obedient ye shall eat the good of the land. [Isa. 1: 9-10]

For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise... Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness with burnt offerings... then shall they offer bullocks upon thine alter. [Ps. 51: 16-19]

What then are the sacrifices of the heart which God desires, before bringing him the offerings and oblations in the flesh? First, God desires us to approach his alter with a heart and spirit of love and thanksgiving. We must have a proper spirit before the sacrifices and works of our flesh will be acceptable to him. The purpose of the sacrifice is to offer glory and thanksgiving unto God; it is merely the final symbol of a heart filled with praise unto God. This is what the Lord desires; not just some outward manifestation or mere formality yet out of a heart completely separated from God [See Ps. 40: 6-10, and I Sam. 15: 22-23]. The requirement of the first great commandment is love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind, soul and strength.

Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice... I am God even thy God... I will take no bullock of thy house, nor he goat out of thy folds... will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the most high. And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me... Whose offereth praise glorifieth me; and to he that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God. [Ps. 50: 5-23]

And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing. [Ps. 107: 22]

The second aspect of acceptable sacrifice after coming unto God with a heart and spirit that is itself right involves the actions to those around the person who proposes to bring an acceptable sacrifice unto God. We are to exhibit the righteousness of the one to whom we profess to bring glory and honor and praise. God desires us to take his character upon ourselves, this desire of God has been present since the beginning of time; what God coming in the flesh through Christ allowed was to have his spirit living within our own life; thereby giving us the ability to overcome sin; and to provide a continuing path of redemption when we fail.

Works become the natural consequence of a heart that is itself right with God. You can have works without righteousness; but you can not have righteousness without works. See also discussion of Faith in Works. This same principle which we have today operating within our lives as part of the body of Christ, the church, was an important aspect and function of righteousness as understood in the Old Testament.

To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice. [Prov. 21: 3]

... that ye may know the righteousness of the LORD... shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? ... O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God? [Micah 6: 5-8]

I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings. [Hos. 6:6] God's plan is to move from mere outward formality and service by the flesh to seeking after God with proper attitude and desire toward him and his law.

... if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the LORD thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he swear unto thy fathers... he will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine... [Deut. 7: 12-13]

Under the O.T. law and promises the focus was upon obedience to the outward fleshly law and ordinances and in response to that righteousness after the flesh, God gave unto his people promises of blessings after the flesh. In the N.T. these promises moved from the outward (fleshly) and moved to the spirit (inward) to the meek, the lowly, the humble, the poor in spirit and the blessings which come from God's renewal were likewise primarily spiritual (inward) in nature. The fruits of God's blessing are love, joy, peace, patience, hope, faith, charity. The result is peace and reconciliation with God. Though these N.T. gifts are inward their purpose and result are seen outwardly currently; yet they have even still a greater eternal purpose which is not yet fully comprehended, which Christ has for his eternal bride, to be revealed in New Heaven and Earth, and in the rewards which he will distribute.

Another aspect of the developmental relationship of the temple in scripture can also be found in the size of the temple itself. The temple of Solomon (I above) is set forth in I Kings 6:2 with the temple measuring approximately 90 feet on each side. During the Kingdom Age (II above) the temple is set forth as measuring approximately one mile square. See Ezek. 41- 43 for temple description, also see Ezek 43:19-21 for sin offering during the Kingdom Age. The Kingdom Age is to be the perfection in this world of God's O.T. law including sacrifice. The final perfect temple will be the New Jerusalem, itself will measure approximately 1,500 miles square (see Rev. 21:9-16). In the New Jerusalem there is no "temple", the city itself is the temple with God (the Lamb, our perfect sacrifice) dwelling within it and among his people. See Rev. 21:3 and verse 22. Just as the sin offering was burned outside the temple so it may still exist outside the New Jerusalem see Isa. 66:24, Rev. 14:10-11. See also New Heaven New Earth.

The unfolding of God's revelation can also be seen in the temple relationship in another way beside the outward physical development. In God's initial description of the temple relationship God says to let his people make him a sanctuary and that he would dwell in the temple among them (Ex. 25:8). Next God states through his redemptive act in Christ, that now our physical bodies are his temple and he (his Spirit) will dwell within us. God formed and fashioned us, yet it is our decision to give our bodies as a temple unto him. Finally, God will dwell physically among us without any distinct temple separating him from his people, in eternal fellowship and communion (the New Jerusalem itself will be the Temple). This final temple will be made by God himself for the express purpose of dwelling among his people forever.

Similarly, the manifestation of God's glory in relationship to his temple is signified throughout the bible by reference to a cloud. The cloud was upon the tabernacle in the wilderness, both day and night, see Ex. 10: 38; Deut. 1: 33. In the Kingdom Age a cloud will be over the temple and the entire city of Jerusalem, see Ezek 43: 2-5. In the New Jerusalem there will be no sun or moon giving light, the lamb will be the light, see Rev. 22:5. Whenever the Bible mentions Christ in his eternal kingly majesty appearing, there is always an overshadowing cloud and light without need of the sun, see Mat 17:5, also Num 9: 15-17.

The final element of revelation of the temple relationship is found in the cleansing process. (I) Responsibility to purify the earthly temple was given to the priests; this was accomplished through sacrifice and the shedding of blood. (II) We must cleanse the temple of our bodies, both in flesh and spirit. This is accomplished through Christ's blood. (III) The New Jerusalem will be purified from its inception and will remain pure throughout eternity; no unclean thing shall enter except those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Rev. 21: 27. Only the priests who were purified were allowed to enter into the temple where the sacrifice was made for the people. In the New Jerusalem we will all be God's priests and we will already be made holy through Christ and our names being written in the Lamb's book of life.

2. Earth. (I) as it existed in Eden for a very limited period, since the sin of Adam it has been under the curse (II) Earth of the Kingdom Age (earthly perfection), the world will be like Eden, for one thousand years (III) New Earth (ultimate perfection) the entire existence will be designed to be perfect from the beginning until the end.

When you go back and review different elements of what was present in the Garden of Eden, and what is present in Jerusalem during the Kingdom Age, and finally in the New Jerusalem, there are certain items which appear in each one yet which increase and each new manifestation. In Eden there is reference to two trees, the tree of knowledge; and a tree of life; also there is a river flowing through the garden. Jerusalem during the Kingdom Age will have trees the fruit of which is for the healing of men; also flowing out of the city is a river from under the throne, which heals the waters. Finally, in the New Jerusalem there will be trees the fruit of which is for the healing of the nations; and there will be a river which runs through the midst of the city. In all three of these places God dwells and communes personally with his chosen people.

3. Knowledge of God. (I) the Law of stone, (II) Law indwelling within us (through the Holy Ghost), see Heb. 8 (III) Face to face, God dwelling among us, commune face to face. Rom 8: 2-4; Gal 3: 21-27; II Cor. 3: 7-11; Rev. 21:3, Ezek. 37: 27.
4. His Children (Children of Abraham). (I) Israel, children of promise of the Old Testament (II) Church after the Spirit in the New Testament; and the nation of Israel in the Kingdom Age (priests to the whole world) (III) God's Elect. Ruling and reigning with Christ, kings and priests before God (New Heaven/Earth). See Ex. 19: 6; Isa. 59: 21; Jer. 4:4

The two preceding areas relate to each other as a development of God's plan as starting out in the flesh, and progressing unto the spirit; the final stage involves into a blending of the flesh and spiritual in a way which we only understand in a general sense, as Paul states, seeing through a glass darkly. Israel related and understood God primarily according to the nature of his earthly manifestation; the law, and through his promises given to them as a people and blessings in this earth. The next stage of development was to move from merely the formality of the law; to a living relationship; through Christ in our hearts, and minds. He took the law; of stone, and wrote them through his spirit upon the fleshly tables of our heart. The stumbling block of Israel related to their refusal to accept this development of relationship moving from merely after the flesh, and outward manifestation of obedience to the law, to the spirit and heart of the individual. Israel's hope and desire continued to be expressed through the eyes of the flesh, the promises of glorification and of deliverance remained predicated upon this world; not the freeing of the heart from the bonds of sin. The Jewish understanding of the O.T. promise of a Messiah was to be a deliverer of the people of Israel, as a nation from oppression; not as a savior and deliverer of the individual from the bondage of sin.

*... the kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say,
Lo here! Or, lo there! For, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.*

[Luke 17: 20-21] Men's hearts failing them for fear... for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. [Luke 21: 26-27]

Howbeit, that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual. [I Cor. 15: 46]

Now to him that is of the power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began. But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith. [Rom. 16: 25-26]

Christ coming as the savior and deliverer of men's souls did not itself abrogate to Israel the promise of a king after the flesh; because Christ shall indeed come again in power and glory to bring deliverance to Israel as a nation. The people who rejected Christ will acknowledge him as Lord and King. The people of Israel will accept Christ in his power and glory when they would not when he came to them in humility and meekness and grace. Just as the Word of God promised he will rule the world in righteousness and with a rod of iron after the dictates of the law. The millennium will stand as God's final fulfillment of the promise given to Israel and giving glory of his chosen people and to his law in the flesh in this world.

The New Jerusalem and earth which God creates for his people will serve as the ultimate reality for which all this world, and its trials, and tribulations are preparing us. God through Christ is calling to himself a people; the body of Christ, to serve as the ultimate representatives of God in the capacities which Christ served in this world. We will serve both as priests and as kings for the nations upon the new earth. Just as God created the garden in Eden to commune with man, the new earth is likewise created for the glory of God through his bride and heirs in grace; and we will eternally commune and worship him face to face in the New Jerusalem.

5. Marriage (I) Husband and wife after the flesh, (II) Spirit of Christ with his earthly church, (III) Christ and the Bride together eternally.

Marriage is a description which constantly occurs throughout scripture relating to the relationship between God and his people, whether Adam and Eve as the first examples, or Israel in a national sense after the flesh, or the church after the spirit. Adam and Eve serve as the first examples of God's plan for relationship between himself and man. Marriage is based on love between a man and woman who bind themselves to each other freely without any qualification. Each forsake their respective families and go forward together creating their own family. There is a natural order ordained in the family; just as there is a natural order in government; and even in the body. The head is over the body; the king or ruler is over the government; and the husband is over the wife. In this respect Christ is the head of the church in all three of these various areas. The

wife is to be subject unto the rule of the husband; but the Bible states that the husband is to love the wife even as himself, or as his own body. Christ has in all respects fulfilled and demonstrated this love unto his people.

God called Abraham and chose him from all the people of the earth because of his spirit and attitude of faith. God not only bound himself to Abraham personally but that promise and relationship is extended to the seed of Abraham. Unlike Abraham, as generation after generation passed the people who comprised that family lost that individual relationship, understanding, and love which existed between Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, his sons, and the Lord their God. As a wife forsakes her husband, so Israel, through idolatry and worshiping other gods, forsook the Lord. Yet God continued to reach unto the children of Israel in their sin, and even through his judgment upon them, he continued to call them back unto a relationship with him.

The church is made part of the promise of God unto Abraham, and is part of the seed of Abraham, through the same process that Abraham himself utilized. We have heard the call of God in our hearts through grace; and have become part of the spiritual seed of Abraham through faith in Christ. Each person who is eventually justified before God will do so because of a personal decision and relationship with God, through Christ Jesus. Just as marriage is based on two parties brought together by mutual agreement; the bride of Christ, is brought to him through a spirit of love; our heart reaching out to his tender call. The Song of Solomon exemplifies this relationship.

The new heaven and earth will provide the environment which Christ and his bride will relate together in the fullness of the relationship which even now; we only begin to understand the very rudiments. Christ's elect will be given responsibilities both as kings and priests. But along with these duties; the whole purpose of the new creation which God is preparing is for a place of abode and fellowship; he will commune with us face to face, whom he purchased with his own blood. A home based on peace, joy, love and praise; this is God's purpose for his people set apart unto himself. All creation shall see the glory and grace of God to those whom he has called unto himself; and will have to give him praise.

*[Jesus Christ] gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. [I
Tim. 2: 6]*

God's plan/will is always to provide some greater fuller, more satisfying and glorious experience for us in the future than what we can and are experiencing today. Once God established his perfect plan it will be fulfilled and accomplished. In all things, God will be glorified. Just as with his chosen people in the flesh, he chose/selected them, then judged them, yet because of his promise and faithfulness during the Kingdom Age his perfect plan for the earth in general (back to Eden) and the exaltation of his earthly kingdom and temple worship under the law (Israel) will be fully realized, until finally his eternal plan is realized in "New Heaven and Earth". Similarly upon death the saved will have rest and reward while the wicked will go into darkness and eternal judgment. God in his righteousness will be justified before all men (saved and lost) he will judge all men,

through Christ by his Word. After this formal judgment then each soul shall receive either reward (heaven) or punishment (hell).

The LORD is longsuffering and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations... the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word; But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD. [Num. 14: 18-21]

As New Testament Christians we often refer to the Old Testament as types and foreshadows of the promise and relationship which God desired for his bride as set forth in the New Testament. This is very true; the O.T. has the purpose to set the basic principles and God's revelation of himself to his creation. He sets forth his law through sacrifice and the commandments to make a way of salvation and new birth through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. What we should remember is that despite this revelation and enlightenment of the O.T. through our N.T. experience it still does not appear what we shall be when Christ returns again and takes us unto himself. When we look back from the perspective of experiencing Christ face to face our eyes will be truly opened and despite the glory and joy unspeakable of this present experience we will understand that this also is just a foreshadowing experience of what is yet to come for those who remain faithful and walk in faith after our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of any holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath day; which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.” [Col. 2: 16-17] Generally Paul makes reference to the things of the O.T. law as having passed away through Christ but here he also indicates that the things of the O.T. law still do have a purpose and place as a shadow of things yet to come in the new heaven and new earth, as well as in the Kingdom Age itself upon this earth. That does not mean that the law as set forth for Israel will arise again in its full effect and operation in the future new earth; even as it will during the thousand year kingdom age, during which time the law itself and God's people Israel will be magnified in this world. In the New Jerusalem and in the new earth there will likely be a more close integration and relation of spiritual things and the physical world than what we can currently comprehend. The things of this world and the law serve as a shadow of the world to come.

God desires us as his children to take upon ourselves his righteousness. As we show forth his righteousness we are showing forth his glory (acting as his 'priests'). God desires to be glorified as a Father through his children, as they succeed and excel. In the new heaven and new earth just as he gave man dominion over nature here on this present earth so he will on the new earth, but our responsibility will go beyond that. We are to be his priests to bring the honor of the nations unto him in the new earth, not just as stewards of natural creation which we are currently. We will be put over not only animals and natural resources but there will be 'persons' (governments) God will put his saints over and give us responsibility/authority concerning. As kings we will also be given

responsibility for righteous judgment of the people. This is an essential element of ruling and reigning with Christ in his new earth.

God's Righteousness

Righteousness constitutes one of the three fundamental elements of God's revealed character, in conjunction with judgment and grace (i.e., love/mercy). God's Holiness is comprised of righteousness and judgment. Righteousness is given great importance in the sight of God, and as he relates to his creation. See Isa. 61:8-11, Ezek. 20:11, Jer. 23:5-6, Jer. 9:24, Jer. 4:2, Prov. 2:9, Isa. 5:7, Isa. 5:16, Isa. 11:5, Isa. 16:5, Isa. 26: 9, Isa. 28:17, Isa. 32: 16-17, Isa. 33: 5, 22, Isa. 42: 1-7, Acts 17:31; Deut. 32: 4.

Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. [Ps. 85: 10]

But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. [Amos 5: 24]

One definition of righteousness is the abhorrence of evil or the hatred of iniquity [see Prov. 8: 13]. Righteousness can thus be said to relate to the attitude, intent, desire, and state of mind of the person, entity, or government being described. Judgment similarly can be thought of as the outward manifestation [or works] of the heart in righteousness.

For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness; neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight; thou hatest all workers of iniquity... But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice... let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee. [Ps. 5: 4-11]

And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever. [Isa. 32: 17]

Man's righteousness relates to the desire to do what is right in the sight of God and the submission to the commandments of God, and when man sins a willingness to seek forgiveness and reconciliation according to the method set forth by God [in the O.T. through sacrifice for sin]. As with all things God is our standard for true righteousness in our own lives.

Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless and him that had none to help him... I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness and it clothed me; my judgment was as a robe and a diadem [crown] I was a father to the poor; and the cause I knew not I searched out. And I broke the jaws of the wicked, and the spoil out of his teeth. [Job 29: 12-17]

There is a responsibility associated with righteousness. The first is to seek after and see righteousness achieved in our individual hearts and lives. The second relates to

families. Parents are instructed to teach their children to love the law, and to seek after righteousness in their own lives. The final area of responsibility for righteousness extends to government. When this responsibility is met, God honors the dedication and consecration and will not forsake the righteous in times of trouble. However when righteousness is not sought after by the person, when it is not conveyed to the succeeding generations; when government forsakes its responsibilities ; then God gives the person, families, and nations over to their own ways to reap the consequences. The consequences of these seemingly individual choices and decisions flow down to others; and just like blessings of righteousness are multiplied so the consequences of the rejection of righteousness similarly multiply.

Related individuals, succeeding generations, and even nations become the victim of their environment. The consequences of the rejection of righteousness by one can affect and bring a family, and even a nation to ruin. Righteousness is centered in the heart; and over time that desire and even an awareness of righteousness can be weakened and even corrupted by the way a person orders and structures their lives. When one individual chooses to substitute an attitude of unrighteousness for that which is acceptable to God, that same attitude can be conveyed to his friends, his family; and even be reflected in the actions of government.

But the LORD shall endure for ever; he hath prepared his throne for judgment. And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness. The LORD will be a refuge for the oppressed and a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee; for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee. [Ps. 9: 7-10] The LORD is known by the judgment which he executeth; the wicked is snared in the works of his own hands... The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God... Put them in fear, O LORD; that the nations may know themselves to be but men. [Ps. 9: 16-20]

The statutes of the LORD... the commandments of the LORD... the fear [reverential trust; faith with hatred of evil] of the LORD, is clean and enduring for ever; the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold... Moreover by them is thy servant warned; and the keeping of them there is great reward. Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back also thy servant from presumptuous sins, let them not have dominion over me... Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight O LORD my strength and my redeemer. [Ps. 19: 8-14]

Law in its unadulterated form reveals God's righteousness to mankind. The emphasis under the law was upon the flesh as able to fulfill the law; or rather demonstrating man through the flesh is unable to meet the requirements set forth by the law. Prior to the revelation of the law; God did and still continues to speak unto the heart

of man through conscience. Under either standard however; the law or conscience; because of the heart of man, and their imaginations, being evil continually, man still was condemned before the eyes of a holy and righteous God.

Law like government itself, as discussed earlier, is administered through sinful man. Because of that fact the righteousness originally ordained by the institution both of government, and of law, become adulterated and corrupted by sin of the people who administer them. Therefore sometimes laws; like governments themselves; and the individuals who comprise the basic components of the governments; can all be unrighteousness in each of their respective spheres; and will reflect that unrighteousness in the nature of the laws which are passed. Even in the most unrighteous of governments, and among unrighteous people, the most basic of laws, tend to still reflect at least in words; the fact that certain protection of rights to the individual are naturally provided by law. Those basic rights include protection from unprovoked physical violence [including murder] and protection of property belonging to the individual [stealing]. Even in the most unjust of governments, which laws themselves may be administered in the most unjust of fashion; yet despite all that yet many of the principles the laws themselves express can be thought of as commonly accepted among all people even of different cultures.

God in his goodness, mercy, and grace, shows himself, and will be held as a witness unto the people who do not know him in the fullness of his revelation. Just as nature calls man to an awareness of God's existence. Government and law point toward the righteousness of God. When properly administered as desired and ordained by God both government and law give man the liberty of expression and belief; along with a structure which respects the rights of the individual and protects against the oppression by the rule of the mob. Thus law and government fulfilling its proper role and purpose gives glory to God in that it naturally reflects righteousness in purpose and function. Many of the basic rights and freedoms set forth as central in Western civilization and in the U.S. Constitution itself are set forth in the Bible including what the proper defined role of government concerns, or more importantly what must be outside the enforcement of government and is within the freedom of each individual themselves. Contrast the following scriptural examples with that of Pilate and the Jews and the treatment of Christ before the law, when Pilate merely washed his hands but abdicated law unto the rule of the mob.

... the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat. Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law... Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews reason would that I should bear with you: But if it be a question of words and names, and of your [religious] law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drove them from the judgment seat. [Acts 18:12-16]

[Silversmiths which made idols to Diana were upset by Paul's preaching] And the whole city was filled with confusion... Some therefore cried one

thing, and some another; for the assembly was confused, and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together... [Alexander] would have made his defense unto the people.. [to hinder him from speaking] All with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And when the townclerk had appeased the people he said... ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. Wherefore if Demetrius and the craftsmen which are with him have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies; let them implead one another. But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly. [Acts 19: 29-41]

Law was exhibited in the fullness of its inherent righteousness through the Ten Commandments given to Israel from God. The law communicated to Israel served to magnify God; because it came directly from God; and it magnified the people of Israel because they were given the fullness of God's revealed righteousness to direct their paths; and the promise of the blessings of God to the extent that they followed the law.

Keep therefore and do them [the law] for this is your wisdom and your understanding, in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day... but teach them thy sons and thy sons' sons... that they may teach their children. [Deut. 4: 6-10]

The Ten Commandments are broken down into two main areas: commandments relating to the relation of man with God; and commandment focusing on men's relations with one another. See Ex. 20: 1-17. In conjunction with these basic commandments there were a number of other judgments and ordinances governing civil disagreements; criminal offenses; health issues; diet; and religious matters for the nation. All these together comprised the law given to Israel. Over time, as is always the case with anything placed in the hands of sinful men; even the laws of Israel were slowly modified to conform to what man desired thereby weakening and diluting the righteousness of the law. The most obvious example of this given in scripture is when Christ discussed the law regarding divorce. Christ said that Moses made the ordinances providing for a bill of divorcement due to the hardness of the children of Israel's heart; and their desire for a legal mechanism to obtain a divorce easier than what was the will of God; thus they used the law as a basis to justify their own iniquity and to sooth their conscience through legal means.

Let us go back and see exactly what comprises these basic Ten Commandments. The five commandments relating to man's relationship to God are as follows: Thou shalt have no other gods before me; Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image; Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them; nor serve them; Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; finally, Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. The five commandments relating to men's relations with other men are as follows: Honor thy father and thy mother; Thou shalt not kill; Thou shalt not commit adultery; Thou shalt not steal; Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor [lie]; Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's property. The lawyer in the New Testament summarized the intent of the law in a positive fashion instead of as negative inferences: Thus the law commands to love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, mind, soul, and strength; and to love thy neighbor as thyself.

Another way of evaluating the righteousness which God was communicating to his people Israel is to read the commandments as pointing man's desires, and heart outward instead of inward toward himself. Whenever our view becomes focused inward toward ourselves; what we want; what our flesh desires; towards pride; and love of self more than love of God, then we will hate righteousness and love iniquity. Understanding the Ten Commandments from this point of view helps to clarify certain of the commandments themselves; and their actual application and God's response to their apparent violation in various situations.

Thou shalt not kill, is one of the commandments given to the children of Israel yet which on numerous occasions this commandment was itself commanded to be violated. It is commonly understood that this commandment should be read as "thou shalt not commit murder", I believe this is accurate. Murder is defined as the killing of another out of personal self-interest, not out of self-defense, or other necessitating factors. When the children of Israel entered into the Promised Land God commanded that all the inhabitants of the land should be killed. Thus the commandment of God became the justification to kill. In war you are commanded by government to kill, and you must kill out of necessity to protect yourself from being killed by the enemy.

Another commandment which is highly discussed; as to the proper application in day-to-day lives is, thou shalt not bear false witness, or as otherwise stated, thou shalt not lie. The Bible especially in the histories of the Old Testament are filled with instances which different people lied for many different reasons. The midwives to the children of Israel in Egypt; were commanded by Pharaoh to kill the Jewish newborns. They did not do this and instead told Pharaoh that the babies were born before they could arrive. The Bible says that God blessed the midwives for their actions. Rahab the harlot hid the spies staying in Jericho and lied to those looking for them saying they had already left; and then helped them to escape the city. Rahab and her family were spared when Israel captured the city; and were themselves incorporated into Israel. Thus a particular action must be evaluated according the situation and circumstance in which it occurs and the intent of the person involved. Righteousness and iniquity goes beyond the outward itself and goes to the heart and intent from which the action is taken.

God's word is righteousness. But that word must be utilized with a heart of love unto God, and a love for fellow man to be found acceptable before God. The improper application of the word of God is sin; in fact it is the worst sin in the eyes of God. Just one example is that in the temptation of Jesus; Satan took Jesus to the top of the temple and quoted scripture accurately to him, regarding the protective and preserving hand of God upon him; yet his purpose in quoting this scripture was to cause Jesus to act with an improper spirit (self-centeredness) upon the promise which was his. Christ realized this fact, and the attempted improper application of scripture and rebuked Satan for it. For greater discussion of this subject see Unpardonable Sin and Doctrine, Legalism, Apostasy. The Word of God can be corrupted; through self-interest unto the destruction of faith in the lives of others. This can be accomplished by destroying their understanding of righteousness; or destroying their personal conscience in the application of God's word to their personal life.

The problem of the Jewish people was that over time; their observance of the law became based on outward conformity with the law; which over time had more and more additional laws, regulations, and traditions layered one upon another. By the time of Christ, it was as though there was some majestic temple of formalism and tradition and required outward manifestation which had itself overshadowed the principles of righteousness which the law was given to communicate. Those who took the most pride in abiding by "the law" and judging those who might lack in one aspect of the formalism and traditions which then comprised the law; were themselves the ones who in their own selfishness and pride; were the most dead to the spirit of the law; and who tried to keep the law as ritual and ceremony, instead of truly God-centered and neighbor-centered love.

Jesus, described the Pharisees who acted as the stewards of the law as merely whitened tombs filled with dead men's bones. The true righteousness of the law by the time of the arrival of Christ had been so fully covered by formalism and legalism that it had lost its value and power in every day life. Thus the law as practiced by the Jews was only a more perfect form of the law given to all the gentile nations, who themselves possessed elements of the righteousness of God yet not the full scope and depth given by God to his people Israel. What Israel received due to this greater revelation of God's righteousness than what the other nations of the world received, was that Israel received greater responsibility and therefore the greater condemnation.

The O.T. legalistic view is whatever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets. See Mat.7:12. The law as it developed under the Pharisees focused on our outward actions not so much our attitude and motive. Thus Christ said Pharisees were like whitened tombs perfect on the outside and beautiful; but inside full of dead bones (filthy in their thoughts, motives, and desires). See Gal. 3:10, under the O.T. law righteousness was obtained through righteous works. The law as a schoolmaster, teacher, set forth God's perfect standard of righteousness, after the flesh. To be accepted of God in our flesh we have to be perfect completely in the law. In the N.T. Christ states we must have correct attitude/desires, motivating us in our actions toward others [love thy neighbor as thyself] see Gal 5:13-14. God's salvation plan is to give us a new 'heart' and a new 'mind'. See Rom 10:10. The intent of the O.T.

law, as already discussed, reflected this fact, God desired the right motive (love) in our spirit both in our relationship with God and our fellow man. See Mat. 22: 37-40. The Beatitudes and The Sermon on the Mount, Jesus sets forth that true righteousness begins with the spirit and attitude and upon that basis God will judge and reward. See Mat. 5.

The criterion of righteousness of the O.T. under 'The Law' is set forth as... 'For I am the LORD your God; ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves; and ye shall be holy, for I am holy... To make a difference between the unclean and the clean. [Lev. 11: 44-47] The Jews who understood the law in its true reality and endeavored to keep both the traditions and regulations which then accompanied the law, and the righteousness itself underpinning the law, still failed. The most that could be accomplished was to seek forgiveness through sin sacrifice. The more that a person understood the law and sought to keep the law, the more manifest it became that because of sin which continued to live in the body and heart of the person, it was impossible to keep their flesh and their imaginations continually under submission to the law. The only alternative given by the law was to continue to turn unto the blood of bullocks and lambs.

For I bear them [Israel] record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. 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. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.... That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth, the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. [Rom. 10:2-10] see also Gal. 5:5

The righteousness of God which is by faith in Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe... for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. [Rom 3:22-23]

... the gentiles which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel which followed after the law of righteousness,, hath not attained to the law of righteousness wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone; As it were written, behold I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense; and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. [Rom. 9: 30-33]

... by the works of th law shall no flesh be justified... I do not frustrate the grace of God, for if righteousness came by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. [Gal. 2: 16, 21]

Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness... they which are of faith the same are the children of Abraham. [Gal. 3:6-9]

Jesus Christ's shed blood accomplished what the blood of bullocks and lambs could not. He became the perfect sacrifice, who gave his life for the sins of the world. Through this process he became sin, he took upon himself our unrighteousness, that we are made righteous not of ourselves, or of our own works, but through Christ. 'Righteousness' is imputed upon us, not earned, when we accept Christ in our hearts through the salvation plan, the new law. We become a new creature in Christ Jesus our Lord. See John 3:3-5, John 3:16, John 4:14 ... for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung that I may win Christ. And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is through the law, but that which is through faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. [Philip. 3: 8-9] We are no longer justified by works, but rather our justification unto God is in Christ Jesus.

And every earthen vessel whereunto any [unclean thing] falleth... it shall be unclean; and ye shall break it. [Lev. 11: 33] Unredeemed man is naturally an earthen vessel (from dust we were made, unto dust we shall return). Being defiled by sin under the law we must be broken/destroyed/cast out. Through Christ when we are saved we are made a new creature. We put off the old man (flesh/sin) and put on Christ.

The salvation experience allows us to become new creatures, no longer under the bondage of sin unto death, but alive through Christ unto eternal life. Just as Christ lived and died in righteousness and love unto God, and unto the world around him, similarly we are charged to live in love unto God and unto others, and not ourselves. The law through Christ moved from stone and was transformed unto law written on the hearts and in the lives of those who take on Christ.

The righteousness of Christ served as a testimony of the sin which previously had been hid in formalism and legalism, in the hearts of the leaders of Israel. As a response to the quickening spirit of the law; revealing to the religious leadership their own sin, they killed Jesus. But even as he was alienating many who were faced with their own inner transgression and sin, yet he was reaching out and touching the lives of those who had been bound in sin, and whose hearts were broken. Today, that same spirit of righteousness which was in Christ works in the church and just as the religious/governmental establishment persecuted him; the church will be called upon to stand as testimony to righteousness against an ungodly world even under the threat of persecution. Despite that persecution, the testimony of the church will continue to reach out in love, even when persecuted, to various individuals whose hearts though bound in sin yet their souls are reaching out unto God.

This is my [Jesus' new] commandment that ye love one another as I have loved you. [John 15:12, and I John 3:11] For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. [James 1: 20] ... vengeance is mine, I will recompense, sayeth the Lord. [Heb. 10: 30]

God's Judgment.

Father judges no man but committeth judgment to the Son. John 5:22 also John 9:39. See also Final Judgment.

Various degrees (kinds) of judgment.

1. Day-to-day: decision making - knowledge and its application in wisdom.
2. God's Chastisement - leading to repentance.
3. Of people - individuals - upon the earth itself in this life. See Mat 10: 15
4. Of the nations - people - on earth.
5. Of the angels
6. Of the sinners/unsaved - under the law.
7. Of the saved - unto rewards in heaven.

Judgment and righteousness are naturally complimentary. It is impossible to have one without the other present. Yet when we discuss judgment the mind naturally goes to the form of judgment associated with the violation of the law; and ultimately the final judgment at which time each person stands before their Creator.

As listed above there are a number of different forms and degrees of judgment. In fact the form of judgment which people come into contact with most in their day-to-day lives is based on how and upon what basis each person makes their individual daily choices. This type of every day judgment (decision making) becomes the basis upon which other areas of judgment come into effect.

Judgment and its Application in the lives of Individuals, Families and Government.

Each person makes their own decision based on the natural faculties which they are born with, and also with those which they develop in their own lives. The degree of righteousness a person has will itself affect the type and degree of judgment that someone exhibits. A person can have a form of righteousness, not necessarily based on godliness, and still have a development of judgment very similar to that which comes from a heart of godly righteousness. Finally there is the heart that is not based on any form of righteousness, but rather is self-centered entirely; in this situation the type of judgment that individual exhibits and develops will reflect that fact; and will be focused on self-justification, not in finding what is good or right.

God gives the commandment that man should desire and seek after judgment. Like other types of blessings, spiritual and material, levels and degrees of judgment are bestowed by God as he chooses. But like many other areas, if a person desires more of God, from repentance to spiritual gifts and also judgment, he will respond to those who seek after it. The desire for judgment on the part of a man is one of the things that please God..

If any of you lack wisdom let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing waivering.... [James 1: 5-6]

... be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. [Mat. 10: 16]

Scriptures give a hierarchy of development in connection with judgment. Those elements include: Understanding (heart or aptitude) - Knowledge (mind or the facts) - Wisdom (proper application of knowledge) - Judgment/Righteousness (wisdom applied in godliness relating to creation) See Prov. 15: 2, 7, 14, 32, 33.

Give therefore thy servant [Solomon] an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad... God said unto him, because thou hast asked... for thyself understanding to discern judgment... I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart. [I Kings 3: 9-12]

Only the LORD give thee wisdom and understanding... that thou mayest keep the law of the LORD thy God. Then shalt thou prosper, if thou takest heed to fulfill the statutes and judgments which the LORD charged Moses with concerning Israel; be strong and of good courage; dread not, nor be dismayed. [I Chron. 22: 12-13]

The question becomes, how do I increase judgment? The answer is like with anything you truly desire, you must seek after it. Ask God to help you and to open your mind and understanding in the area of judgment. But after asking for it, you have to step out and strive to develop your understanding, and your level of knowledge. A heart of understanding is somewhat a natural gift (like natural IQ). But even with that predisposition towards understanding the person still requires the knowledge. An aptitude of understanding is like the engine, but knowledge is the gas which gives it fuel; wisdom is then the ability to command with skill the engine; and finally righteousness/judgment comprises the skilled use of that engine to the purpose which is acceptable in the sight of God.

Another question arises; is there only one right standard of judgment in a specific situation? The answer to this has to be no. If there is only one correct choice in any specific situation, then why did God create more than one person; if the sole reason for God's purpose in man is to have someone to share fellowship and judgment with in eternity. If there is only right choice at any time then what is the need for a multitude of individuals all doing the exact same thing in every situation. One of the glorious reasons for why God has chosen a variety of individual people to comprise his heavenly kingdom; is the variety of judgment which each of his beloved saints bring to a decision.

In fact the Lord desires us to seek after his guidance and direction, when we are making our own judgments; occasionally, God asks us to take actions which based our own wisdom, experience and judgment would never lead us to do. Faith is what allows us to give over our own judgment to that of our Lord. Jesus told his disciples after a long

night of fishing without catching anything that they should cast their nets out one more time. Despite the apostles own judgment as professional fishermen that it was useless to cast out their nets one more time, yet based on faith they did. The result was more fish than what their one ship could handle. God glories in going beyond what we think is possible if we give ourselves over to his commandments; he desires to show himself mighty in our eyes and to be magnified by us.

Each of us is formed by God with uniqueness in our character in our attitudes before we were formed in the womb. After being born our family lives, our life experiences, our health issues and our social and economic status, and a variety of other factors all work together to develop our personalities. The combination of all these outside factors in combination with the intangible internal aspects of our God given character all work together to make us who we are as people. Salvation allows us to overcome the various factors which work together made us servants to sin; some to a much more obvious degree than others. Even after all being made joint heirs with Christ, each person is unique from any other saved individual. This uniqueness will tend to lead us to various kinds of judgments based on the same situation. Not making the same decision or taking the same approach does not necessarily make one righteous and one unrighteous. Within God's will there is room for variety in judgment; God loves working with each of us individually with our own uniqueness yet making us part of the still larger body of Christ which taken together, and not merely as individuals who sometimes even appear to be opposing parts, yet still comes together in perfect unity. Paul and Silas separated themselves in their missionary work because of Timothy who had gone back home, in the course of time Paul reconciled himself to Timothy, and the missionary work was accomplished.

By stating there is not necessarily one correct standard of judgment in any given situation is not the same as saying every judgment is necessarily correct. Righteousness in judgment is the criteria that must be met, and the standard we are judged against. What we are obligated to do is make sure that our hearts and minds are right with God and in alignment with his holiness and not seeking after our own will in making decisions. Our judgment and the type of judgments we make will directly reflect the type of relationship we have developed in our hearts and minds to God. We are to work out [through our judgment and conscience] our salvation with fear and trembling. Therefore we are responsible for the wrong judgments we undertake, even if we make ourselves believe we are following 'God's righteousness'. Thus the injunction to 'fear and trembling' whenever we approach the decision we undertake through our judgment we are obligated on the threat of our own soul that we have our hearts truly open to be aware of God's will and standard of righteousness; which our judgment must meet.

Judgment in human affairs carries forward from the individual, to the family, and finally is fulfilled in government. How judgment is effectuated in each sphere in relation to the established plan and purpose of God will form the basis for how God himself judges that individual, family, and finally nation or government.

Parents are instructed to raise up their children in the way which they should go. Teaching and communicating righteousness becomes the obligation of the family. The parents should judge and reprove after the flesh; just as God serves to judge and chastise us as his children after the spirit. The failures of meeting the standard of judgment in our responsibilities as parents for our children affect them both after the flesh and after the spirit. Failure to properly discipline, and instruct both by our word and actions as parents, result in long term and persistent detrimental affects not just on our children themselves, but can be carried forward to successive generations.

*And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses. [Lev. 10: 11]
...Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children. [Deut. 4: 10] And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. [Duet. 6: 6-7] see also Duet. 11: 19.*

Train up a child in the way he should go; when he is old, he will not depart from it. [Prov. 22: 6]

Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him. [Prov. 22: 15] Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell. [Prov. 23: 14]

Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father and attend to know understanding. For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law... Let thine heart retain my words; keep my commandments and live. Get wisdom, get understanding; forget it not... wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting get understanding... She shall be to thine head an ornament of grace, a crown of glory, shall she deliver unto thee. [Prov. 4: 1-9]

Even if parents meet their responsibility and do all they could be expected to, it does not guarantee their children will themselves follow the example or walk in the path that their parents have laid out before them. Each individual arrive at the point where they make their own choice and what is in their own heart is expressed in individual judgments through their actions. What the righteous teachings of parents accomplish is to give a roadmap or a compass in their children's heart; so like the Prodigal Son who left the father of his own volition to fulfill his own desires, yet when he repented of his decision in his heart he still had the knowledge of how to get back to his father's house, and the father was awaiting him with open arms.

By the same standard even if a person's family failed to provide the type of environment which taught righteousness, that child has the opportunity to search out for themselves the path that are right and true. If a person's heart turns toward God and desires after him as already stated, he will be found. The desire to search after righteousness and judgment; especially in the fullness of that expression in love of God, requires preparing the heart and mind, just as for a race or any other endeavor requires specific preparation. Ultimately, the right and the responsibility rests with each person.

And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD. [II Chron. 12: 4] describing King Rehoboam. Contrast with this, Nevertheless there are good things found in thee ... [thou] hast prepared thine heart to seek God. [II Chron. 19: 3] regarding King Jehosaphat

Government, just as individuals and families, has an obligation in the conduct of its affairs to exercise righteous judgment. In the context of government the kings, rulers, magistrates and judges stand in the position of the father or parents in the family relationship. Based on their decision making process and the way in which they lead their people; there will be long-term effects well beyond the specific individuals who might occupy the position. The road in which successive generations tread and where that road eventually leads will be determined by the degree of righteous judgment which the government executes. The duty of judgment imposed upon government by God begins with establishment of an atmosphere which encourages righteousness, and second it requires some formalized order in the mechanisms in which judgment is dispensed.

Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate, it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph. [Amos 5: 15]

Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassion every man to his brother; and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor, and let none of them imagine evil against his brother in your heart. [Zech. 7: 9-10]

The rulers of government stand before God as the representative of their people; just as the father does for his family; and as a pastor does for his church. The Bible gives direction as to the process for establishing righteous judgment. Just as an individual must prepare their hearts to seek after wisdom and judgment, the same effort is demanded of princes and rulers of government to establish their nation's paths in righteousness.

The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. [II Sam. 23: 3]

Only the LORD give thee wisdom and understanding... that thou mayest keep the law of the LORD thy God. Then shalt thou prosper, if thou takest heed to fulfill the statutes and judgments which the LORD charged Moses

with concerning Israel; be strong and of good courage; dread not, nor be dismayed. [I Chron. 22: 12-13]

Neither shall he [the King] multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away; neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold. And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of the law in a book out of that which is before the priests and the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel. [Deut. 17: 17-20]

And Jehosaphat... brought them back unto the LORD God of their fathers. And he set judges in the land.. And said to the judges, Take heed what ye do; for ye judge not for man, but for the LORD who is with you in judgment; wherefore now let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed and do it; for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts... in Jerusalem.. Set of the Levites and of the priests and of the chief of the fathers... for the judgment of the LORD... Thus shall ye do in the fear of the LORD faithfully, and with a perfect heart... ye shall even warn them that they trespass not against the LORD and so wrath come upon you... this do and ye shall not trespass... Deal courageously and the LORD shall be with the good. [II Chron. 19: 4-11]

The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honorable. [Isa. 42: 21]

The failure of government in the area of righteous judgment is recounted numerous times throughout the Bible and history. Individuals failure to meet their responsibilities, relating to their positions within the government, result in the decay of the public life and atmosphere in which the people of a nation function. Just like a family, the failure of the parents in the area of righteousness, can have continuing effects for generations after, so government which fosters an atmosphere of injustice or unrighteousness can have effects on the public life of a country and influence detrimentally the family lives of its citizens for generations.

Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; every one loveth gifts and followeth after rewards; they judge not the fatherless; neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them. Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts... I will ease of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies. [Isa. 1: 23-24]

And the children of Israel did secretly those things which are not right against the LORD their God, and they built them high places in every city.... And they set them up images and groves in every high hill... For they served idols, whereof the LORD had said unto them ye shall not do this thing. Yet the LORD testified against Israel... Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes according to all the law which I commanded your fathers... Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, that did not believe the LORD their God. And they rejected the statutes and his covenant that he made with their fathers... and they followed vanity and became vain... [II Kings 17: 9-15]

Government can be seen as a reflection of its society. Just as with individuals, and family units, each is a product of their respective economic and social conditions, and each is a product of its own history and standards of acceptable behavior, as set forth in each family's and nation's own laws. A strong legal system, free from graft and corruption is probably the exception as opposed to the rule in our world. Many argue that it is the economic strength which gives a society and through it the government the capacity to operate in an fair and equitable manner towards all its citizens. There is no definitive proof that the economic situation of a nation is the reason for higher standards of justice for the government, or whether it is the culture and moral climate which is the basis for the government to function which eventually allows for economic strength of the nation. Government is still obligated to provide just and equitable laws and the application thereof, regardless of their economic or social conditions.

A government which fulfills its responsibilities faithfully and fairly does not necessarily mean that it is a "Christian" or even more generally some "religious" basis for the government. Just as a individual can live a "good" life and meet all the commonly understood obligations and requirements of the community does not mean that the person themselves have a religious motivation for those actions. Even in this situation, as discussed regarding personal morality and behavior even without an acknowledged basis upon God, yet government like man, is divinely established and his ways paths and character is ordained of God; for God's plan whether the person or the government is aware of that fact or not.

God's Judgment and It's Application to Individual's Families, and Government.

Judgment is effectuated by God upon his creation in various, forms, fashions and degrees. I will not attempt to discuss here some of the particular types of judgment which were listed at the beginning of this section. The reason for this is that in later chapters I will discuss them in greater detail separately. This includes Chastisement and Final Judgment and Rewards in Heaven.

Judgment is the action of God to the decisions and choices made by man as required under the standards of righteousness. God's judgment is also in relation to the fulfillment of his perfect plan and purpose. God may appear to treat two situations which

appear in all respects to be identical and yet take different approaches to judgment. We must understand that God acts as sovereign over all men, families, and nations; he can and does extend mercy and grace, as he desires, and by the same respect can bring forth judgment immediately or delayed as it seems good to him. God created all things for himself, and his perfect plan will be accomplished, the only issue is how we through our choices and God's own divine judgment decides to deal with us.

As previously discussed, God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. As finite beings we attempt to think about God in our own terms and context. By the very definition God exceeds our comprehension in all areas. Thus in the areas of God's judgment in relationship to mankind he makes decisions on individual and group basis at the same time, while at the same time working all things both now and into the infinite future to achieve his perfect plan. Thus when it is said that God's ways and paths are far above ours, that statement is made in the fullest sense of its meaning. God's judgment in the management of creation's affairs is total, he establishes the way of principalities, powers, angels, and men.

... for God hath power to help, and to cast down. [II Chron. 25: 8]

Talk no more exceedingly proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth, for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed... the LORD killeth and maketh alive, he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The LORD maketh poor and maketh rich... he raiseth up the poor out of the dust... to make them inherit the throne of glory... he will keep the feet of his saints... the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth. [I Sam. 2: 3-10]

Man's judgments and actions are like waves of a pebble dropped in a pond. They move out and affect the water successively all around them. As discussed our individual behavior affects those who follow us in our families, but we also affect those around ourselves our friends, our neighbors, our enemies. Each of these contacts in turn can effect those people's own families, their neighbors, their enemies. One person's actions can affect generations upon generations of another family just from one contact which at the time might appear not significant at all. For example, one conversation with a stranger in a store just for a minute might slow down a person from finishing shopping so that they miss being involved in a car accident that might have ended their lives and affected their family for generations; or the opposite it might cause them to be involved in an accident. In either case, in the final analysis, God is the factor which directs and establishes the course of all things, he knows our small actions and he knows our most detailed choices, and he uses each for the furtherance of his perfect will.

God's judgment takes all these small ripples of individual lives which may appear at any one point in time or at one point of view to be complete chaos and yet within the context of God's view they all come together to form a perfect lake. Another way of considering our individual lives is that sometimes we feel as though we are standing in a room with a stain glass ceiling made up of thousands of individual panes each separate

from the others; and each one in its location seemingly incongruous with all the others. Standing in the middle of the room the light being reflected from the sun appears to create total confusion all around you. What God's judgment does is give us the understanding that he will take each of these individual panes of glass and pull them all together so that finally when you look around you have a single beautiful ray of light shining on you through all those individual facets which before had been disorganized.

Many people use the presence of evil and suffering in the world as the basis for the argument there is no God or that God cannot therefore himself be loving and just. The premise of this statement is misguided in a couple of areas. First, we are not in a position to make the final decision of what is "evil" or what is "wrong". This supposes that we are in possession of all the facts necessary to make this final determination which is binding upon God. As we think upon that premise, it becomes quickly apparent that as finite beings in the scope of our knowledge, experience, and understanding we cannot definitely make that decision in the place of God. The second aspect is that God, as Lord of all and Creator, has authority to establish all things does not answer to the creation, this may seem extremely unfair or undemocratic to the majority of creation, yet that is the cold hard truth. On a softer note, God is indeed faithful and he will reward either on the earth or in heaven according to his just will. Our problem in attempting to force our own judgments upon God is we are unable to see far enough down the road or around the corner to understand the fullness of God's righteousness and judgment. That is where the element of faith and patience are required. See [Trials](#) and [Tribulations](#).

Satan, in his heart, was a murderer from the beginning. He was full of pride, yet the Bible says God allowed him in his close fellowship (he walked in the fire of God's holy mountain). God did not cast him out of Heaven until he finally took some active action against the authority of God (he rebelled). He was given sufficient time that a third of angels were convinced to follow him. He lied and corrupted those angels the same way he did Eve. Similarly, Judas had the attitude/desire (a thief) that eventually led him to his betrayal of Christ. Yet knowing that (see John 6: 70), Christ maintained his relationship toward him, so much that even when he was being betrayed he still called Judas 'friend'. Thus God relates to each person in the context of perfect knowledge, yet he never ceases to respect where we are today in our relationship towards God, he will not judge us based on our future action, only on our present state.

Under the concept of righteousness, outside of grace, the law becomes the principal which all men in their actions and attitudes are measured against. Righteousness under the law is measured by acts but in conjunction with a right heart and intents. These two elements together are the predicate for being found righteous. This perfect standard is applied to all men in the application of judgment of God, who is himself perfect. No sin, no transgression, is acceptable. A perfect life under that standard of righteousness, yet a transgression in one instance in one area negates all the other righteous acts of a man. God sees and judges man based on his heart/mind, his thoughts, and intents not only by the (outward) actions. Rom. 11:33-36, I Cor. 4:5; I Kings 8: 39; Prov. 15: 11.

... The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression... neither shall the righteous be able to live in his righteousness in the day that he sinneth... if he trust in his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed he shall die for it... Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. O ye house of Israel, I will judge you ... after his ways. [Ezek. 33: 12-20]

Before the birth of Christ, the focus on justification before God in righteousness become focused on the outward the fleshly, compliance with the letter of the law. Yet the standards of God's righteousness had not changed even though they might have been forgotten. Jesus brought back to the remembrance of the people, and to the conviction of the religious leadership of his day that God commanded a proper heart and attitude. God's judgment involved the compliance with the commandments of Moses with the heart which itself loved both God and man. Mat. 5: 27-30, the Sermon on the Mount sets forth the basis of God's judgment under righteousness not under the popular understanding of mere outward compliance with the O.T. law but rather that God will measure the outward action along with the inward thoughts, desires and intents of the heart, and mind. See further discussion of basis of judgment under righteousness applied to gentiles as well as Jews under Basis Final Judgment.

... found a man that gathered sticks upon the Sabbath day... the LORD said unto Moses. The man shall be surely put to death... [Num. 15: 32-35] Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them that 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. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifest... which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all that believe; for there is no difference; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his [God's] grace. Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood... ... [Rom. 3: 19-25] And the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. [Rom. 7: 10] For as many are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written. Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident for, the just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith... [Gal. 3: 10-12] ... if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. [II Cor. 3: 9]

... proved both jew and gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written, there is none righteous no not one. [Rom. 3: 9-10]

Christ went beyond the formal and outward; he reached down into the heart and turned man inside out and stated that in the judgment all man's actions would be laid

open for the view of all men at the judgment. Envy, pride, arrogance, covetousness and lust will all be manifest in the judgment, despite the most pious of facades which a man might through the best of his efforts erect.

There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed and hid that shall not be known. [Mat.10: 26]

For the word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit... and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart... all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him whom we have to do. [Heb 4: 12-13]

The word made flesh was fulfilled in Christ Jesus. God incarnate. Jesus came to bear witness to a sinful world of the righteousness of God; he came in mercy and love to draw those who would believe in him unto salvation through grace; and he came to be the standard in the flesh of the righteousness of the law in application in life against which all other men would stand in judgment. Christ's life in the flesh takes away the argument of any other man who will stand in judgment that God's law is unjust or unrighteous because no man could walk perfectly therein, both in action and in their heart. Christ represents that fleshly perfection, and thus unto him will the Father commit the judgment of all men.

Luke chapter 7 sets forth the relationship of Christ to the world as the word [law] made flesh. The law was shown as glorious in that against it the unrighteousness and evil hearts of man were made perfectly manifest in contrast to Christ's righteousness. The law shows forth the righteousness of God in the flesh. Christ came in the flesh to bear witness against the world by showing its works were evil under the law. The hatred of the religious leaders of the Jews against Jesus was so fervent that it was common knowledge they desired to kill Jesus, at the same time they all recognized the law stated "thou shalt not kill".

The righteousness of God, through the word was made manifest in the flesh first in the law and finally in its fullness in Jesus Christ. All men stand before God who reveals the desires and intents of the heart. Before God's standard for righteousness every man is known under the criteria of the law as a sinner, regardless of how those around us may view us; or how we make ourselves appear.

God will go beyond what our actions are and our outward behavior. He will look deep into the heart to know why we did what we did. Some who have preached in Christ's name, some who have healed and cast out demons in Jesus name, yet Jesus will not acknowledge them because they were seeking after their own glory and benefit through their actions, not because of true commitment and love of Christ, but after the flesh. See Mat. 7:22-23, John 5:22-27, John 7:24.

... for the LORD seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart. [I Sam. 16: 7]

... For thou [God] only knowest the hearts of the children of men... there is no man which sinneth not... [II Chron. 6: 30, 36]

... judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God. [I Cor. 4:5]

When God judges he will prove his decision based on every word and deed. Out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks and our actions will eventually display what is in our heart. See Mat 12: 34-37, Mark 8: 34-38, Luke 6: 44-45, James 3: 8. God takes glory in establishing the steps and paths of a man, he leads us to a point and situation in which the intents of our heart will be exhibited in our words and in our actions. See further discussion in Temptations.

But, O LORD of hosts, that judges righteously, that triest the reins and the heart... [Jer. 11: 20]

Though God's judgment may not be immediate yet it is sure. God by his divine authority can withhold executing judgment in his mercy and grace giving the sinner the opportunity to repent and be saved. God's judgment is tempered by his mercy and grace. He is a good and loving God. See Chastisement as judgment of God towards repentance and turning back from sin.

Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgeth; for wherein thou judgeth another, thou condemneth thyself, for thou that judgeth dost the same thing [unto gentile moralizers]. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them that commit such things... despiseth thou the riches of [God's] goodness and forbearance... not knowing the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after the hardness and impertinent heart treasureth up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. Who will render to every man according to his deeds... For there is no respect of persons with God. [Rom 2: 1-11]

What is the purpose of judgment? As already stated it is an essential element of righteousness. A righteous God will not allow iniquity in his presence. God made himself flesh, through Christ, and himself became our way of justification, through his sacrifice and our accepting him as Lord over our hearts and lives. Choice becomes the basis for receiving God in our lives, and giving ourselves to him in love and faith; just as choice is how we deny him, and seek after our own desires and the love of this world as opposed to holiness, righteousness and godliness. Judgment will act as the basis to show forth the value and importance of the decision each person makes in their lives. It will serve as a example and instruction to the righteous. The final judgment will serve the purpose first of establishing the basis of judgment upon each person before a righteous God, yet the process will act as instruction of the righteousness of God in actual

application within the lives of individuals. Through this process God will teach his people, who he has saved and called unto himself, who will rule and reign in righteousness with him in the new heaven and new earth. See New Heaven and New Earth.

The LORD hath made all things for himself; yea even the wicked for the day of evil. [Prov. 16: 4]

And Joshua said... Ye cannot serve the LORD for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins... the people said... Nay but we will serve the LORD... Ye are witnesses against yourselves... Now therefore put away... the strange gods that are among you; and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel. [Josh. 24: 19-23]

When the scorner is punished the simple is made wise; and when the wise instructed he receiveth knowledge. The righteous man wisely considereth the house of the wicked; but God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness. [Prov. 21: 11-12]

In conjunction with the judgment of individuals; there is an effect based on both families and governments. Each individual, in the end, must stand alone in judgment; however each person is affected by their family and their government. The effect of both these divinely established institutions, and their own history and attitude concerning righteousness toward God, will have a dramatic effect on the life of the individuals under their influence. Further it is clear that the attitude of God towards individuals within these groups is affected by those around them and those who have come before them, and in fact, who will come after them.

Families lay the foundation on which future generations are to develop. They become the tillers of the field of the hearts and conscience upon which succeeding generations themselves grow and develop. The atmosphere in which children are brought up; will affect their own willingness to accept Christ and to follow after him. The atmosphere of the family largely establishes whether a person will have a heart and attitude to love and submit themselves to God or to be rebellious and hard of heart towards the things of God. See previous discussion of Righteousness relating to families. God relates to families in judgment upon the basis of their attitude towards God.

The O.T. law stated that each man should stand in judgment for his own sin. No son should die for the offense of their father [see Duet. 24: 16; and Ezek 18: 20]. God himself, as sovereign creator of all things, provides that he does have and will exercise authority of imputing responsibility to future generations of individuals, as he sees fit. He can show mercy and grace and he can execute judgment as he wishes.

...for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments . [Ex. 20: 5-6] see also Ex. 34: 7; Num. 14: 18; Duet. 5: 9-10

And the children of Israel did secretly those things which are not right against the LORD their God, and they built them high places in every city.... And they set them up images and groves in every high hill... For they served idols, whereof the LORD had said unto them ye shall not do this thing. Yet the LORD testified against Israel... Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes according to all the law which I commanded your fathers... Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, that did not believe the LORD their God. And they rejected the statutes and his covenant that he made with their fathers... and they followed vanity and became vain... [II Kings 17: 9-15]

The Biblical references to God's relationship to government and judgment are even more extensive than those which relate to families. Government can be viewed as the extension over a large group of people of the combined effects of choices related to righteousness and judgment exercised by individuals and then families over extended periods of time.

Just as God's judgment for blessings and curses follow individuals and families, the same standards are applied to nations. God will be faithful to fulfill all those promises, just as he punished Israel for its transgressions against God's revealed word [the law] through national judgment. God also through his relationship and covenants with Abraham gave blessings to Israel.

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. [Gen. 12: 3-4] That in blessing I will bless thee...and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies: And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.[Gen. 22: 17-18]

God moves on the hearts and minds of nations, through its leaders, and even its people as a group. The purpose of God is in furtherance of his own divine will and plan. In the fullness of time all things work together to accomplish God's will. As an eternal and infinite God he looks at a nation much the same as he does man. He knows the ends of man's paths, he knows his final decision based on that person's choice made, before they are ever born. He knows what is in man's heart before he is born, and he glories in establishing and using man's actions whether they are for good or for evil, to fulfill his perfect plan of calling a chosen people unto himself. The same way he knows the

development of nations and peoples. He similarly directs their paths and development according to his final purpose, that being the glorification of his final earthly kingdom upon earth, and the establishment of the eternal kingdom of God.

But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him for the LORD thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand... [Deut. 2: 30]

... ye have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt... Yet the LORD hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day. [Deut. 29: 2-4]

For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly... [Josh. 11: 20]

When we study the Bible the focus is upon how God has used the nation of Israel as the means of bringing sinful man back into reconciliation with a holy God. It shows the development of this personal relationship and unfolding revelation of righteousness through Abraham and his sons continuing to the Jewish nation as a whole. But God is also directing and establishing the course of development of all the nations that surrounded Israel, and how they related to Israel, he guided them and directed their paths for his purposes of testing and trying his people. The failure of Israel spiritually opened up the opportunity for blessings for the whole world, all this according to the purpose and plan of God.

Kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall. All these occurrences are within the view and knowledge of God who sets the bounds and terms of nations and empires just as he established the bounds of the sea. All this he holds within his own hands and his sovereign will. All creation is under his power, he knows when a sparrow falls from the sky, and he knows the principalities and powers of this earth, just as he knows and directs those which exist and will exist in heaven.

Yea thou heardest; yea, thou knewest not; yea, from that time that thine ear was not opened for I knewest that thou wouldest deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb. [Isa. 48: 8]

Governments just like people have hearts, spirits and attitudes. This makes sense because as already stated governments in their essence constitute the coming together of individuals and families into a organized fashion. Those common shared attitudes and choices become imprinted upon and reflected in the government. However this does not necessarily mean that the heart of the government at all times reflects the spirits of each of the individuals or even the spirit and desire of the people as a whole at one specific point at time. All these pushing and pulling influences within government and society are known to God and he in fact directs how these influences work together or against each other, and what the final effects thereof are. For instance, Rehoboam and his advisors as the leaders of Israel, upon the death of Solomon, refused the petition of the

people of Israel for relief from taxes, and the end result was that ten of the twelve tribes of Israel followed Jeroboam and formed a separate government. All this was foreordained and established according to the purpose of God. See II Kings 17: 9-15.

Governments will be judged for the “spirit” and “attitude” which the nation itself develops. The judgment upon nations is after the physical and fleshly. There is no eternal judgment of nations or governments as separate entities. The form of judgment will be in blessings and curses. Judgment can take the form of pestilence upon a land, famine, economic disasters, or wars, or its people being killed or taken prisoner and dispersed unto foreign lands, and any other similar type of occurrence. Through this judgment of a government, the people who suffer are the people who are citizens who live under that system. The ‘innocent’ thus suffer when they may not have had any contact or responsibility themselves for what brought the judgment itself upon the nation. Just as with other types and fashions of judgment, the sin and the penalty, may not correspond closely in time. God sent Jonah to prophesy judgment upon the city of Nineveh, the king and people repented of their sin, and God delayed that judgment, for approximately forty years, yet eventually that city was destroyed just as God had ordained.

But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me. Because thy rage against me and thy tumult is come up into my ears, therefore I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back... [II Kings 19: 27-28] see also Isa. 37: 28-29.

The people, who live under a particular government, will still stand alone before God and will be judged. Government has a great effect on the souls of those individuals who live under them, because it creates the atmosphere which encourages righteousness or unrighteousness through its system of laws and general governance. Over time a government can move farther and farther from the standards of godly righteousness until its entire structure is in fact opposed to those principles. This opposition to godliness is manifest through the nature of the laws it passes and its system to enforce them.

Families make a atmosphere which future generations are raised up or not raised up in an atmosphere of righteousness and knowledge of God. Government places yet another layer of this development and atmosphere in which succeeding generations come to be aware of God, and develop an heart, and attitude, to seek after him. In the final analysis, each person reaches out toward God or does not, what family and government does is foster the environment which is most conducive and proper in making the best decision which that person themselves can. But even if the atmosphere of the family is not towards the things of God, and the government in its actions opposes to standards of righteousness and godliness, yet each person must still seek out God with all their heart. An atmosphere of indifference and even active opposition by family and government make this finding of God almost impossible when that individual is confronted with the knowledge of God, their heart most likely will not be in a position to hold on to this truth, much less to allow it to take root and grow in their heart and life. This does not mean no person who comes out of a bad family and government environment can not receive God

in their heart, but what it means is that they must have a heart which is more open and hungering for the things of God than what many similar hearts naturally have. Therefore the number of people who will receive the truth of God and actually accept and act upon that revelation of the righteousness of God is much smaller than what is possible with a environment of family and government which encourages godliness. Given all these worldly barriers and hurdles that an person faces in finding salvation the need is even more manifest for which the Bible states so clearly, how can they hear without a preacher; and how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things [see Rom 10: 15].

Because they had not executed my judgments, but had despised my statutes... wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good... O House of Israel thus saith the LORD GOD; Go ye serve ye ever one his idols...[Ezek. 20: 24, 25, 39] So I gave them up to their own hearts lusts; and they walked in their own counsels. [Ps. 81: 12]

This is not to say that the eternal fate of each person who lives under a form of government which opposes God, either actively or more passively, will not be able to receive the gospel. As stated previously all things work for the purpose and plan of God. Therefore God glories in taking the actions of oppressive government and using that very oppression as a means of opening up the hearts of people to the fact that they have a need in their heart that government is unable to fill. Thus their hearts are in some ways more prepared and open to receive the word of God than what a people who are complacent through some government which may not promote some tangible antipathy toward God and righteousness, but rather which only seeks to dull the hearts of people through a focus upon materialism, and momentary gratification. This has been the effect of western governments in general, and the effect has been seen generally in the religious life of those countries, or rather the lack thereof. In many ways there was a more vibrant and focused spiritual life in individual lives within many communistic countries despite their government's active persecution of religion.

Exactly how God judges governments and nations is much like how he approaches individuals. He sometimes brings judgment through chastisement to bring a nation back to him through national repentance. Other times he does nothing and in fact just gives them over the attitude which caused the nation to sin, he gives the spirit of sin reign in their actions until they become a slave to that same unrighteousness which they lifted up ahead of God. Other nations will he seem to blessed, in their unrighteousness and even active opposition to what is understood as godliness; yet in an instant, God will bring destruction without any opportunity to turn aside and no man will be able to save them. Scripture indicate that in executing judgment against governments God glories in taking that people's own supposed strength and wisdom and confounding its own plans and aspirations, especially when that nation and its leaders suppose to exalt themselves against God.

... Therefore hear the word of the LORD; I saw the LORD sitting upon his throne, and all the host of heaven standing on his right hand and on his

left. And the LORD said, Who shall entice Ahab king of Israel that he may go up and fall... And one spake after this manner and another saying after that manner. Then there came out a spirit and stood before the LORD and said, I will entice him and the LORD said unto him wherewith? And he said I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of these his prophets. And the LORD said thou shalt entice him, and thou shalt also prevail, go out and do even so... behold... the LORD hath spoken evil against thee. [II Chron. 18: 18-22]

God's Grace

*T'was grace that taught my heart to fear
And Grace my fears relieved*
[Amazing Grace, John Newton, 1725-1807]

It is amazing that often the lyrics in a song are able to capture most accurately the depth of a concept. These two lines show the potentially opposing elements of grace. The first is the fact that grace is not a right; grace is an unmerited act of love conferred upon a person. It speaks to the debt which each sinner owes to a righteous God, and that unless forgiveness is extended that payment in full under the law will be required. It is only through grace that our eyes are opened so we are even aware of the debt we owe related to sin, once aware of that condition the natural result is to fear. At the same time grace is the assurance that a loving and merciful God has paid the price for our transgressions already, if only we will accept him under the terms he has set forth.

Grace and Judgment (Vessels of Dishonor):

Too often today, the concept of grace is used as a blank check upon which everyone draws upon to console themselves relating to their “relationship” with God. They hold grace out as a shield against any eternal judgment of their actions while chanting the mantra that “God is love”. It is very true that God is love, but as already discussed this love is expressed and experienced through the characteristics of righteousness and judgment. It is the aspect of God’s love which allows man to find reconciliation through grace unto a righteous God. Nowhere in scripture does it say that God will accept anyone who shows up at the wedding supper based on the open invitation given to all men. To be accepted there still needs to be coming forth with the proper attitude and behavior which is acceptable garment to enter into the final wedding supper.

When you read the parable of the king’s wedding supper, there were a number of people who refused the call and invitation to come. They cited other pressing business as the basis for their refusal, the cares of this life were of most importance, they had land to purchase, and fields to attend to. They did not see the need or the benefit of responding to the call and accepting the invitation when directly confronted with the decision. It is the grace of God that allows our ears to hear, our hearts to comprehend the necessity and the privilege to respond to the call of God in our hearts.

Tell this people, hear but understand not... see but perceive not... Make the heart fat... ears heavy... lest they see and hear and understand... and convert and be healed. [Isa. 6:9-10] see also Rom 9:11-22 ... lest at any time they should be converted and their sins be forgiven them. [Mark 4:11-12]. It is God’s own will and grace those whose eyes do see and ears do hear and whose heart are open to receive and understand God’s word. Mat. 13: 13-15, Grace is the spirit that leads a man to repentance; and it is God’s grace withheld which keeps a heart from hearing the call.

... Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the LORD... Now be ye not stiffnecked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the LORD... serve the LORD your God, that the fierceness of this wrath may turn away from you. For if ye turn again unto the LORD, your brethren and children shall find compassion before them, that lead them captive... for the LORD your God is gracious and merciful and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him. [II Chron. 30: 6-9]

God through his sovereign authority as the creator of all things forms and fashions the basic heart, soul, and spirit of each person. Some people's hearts are a literal sponge which from the very beginning seems to have a thirst and desire for God in every area and segment of their life. On the other hand, there are certain people who have hearts that almost seem to be unalterably inclined to wickedness and iniquity, and rebellion from the time they are born. Finally, there is the great majority of people some more inclined to one direction or the other perhaps than most, yet the great majority are just somewhere in the middle. Regardless of where in this spectrum a particular person falls as to their innate sensitivity or lack thereof to "spiritual things" each and every one was fashioned as they were by God himself before they were ever born.

Once God gives each person their basic spiritual or moral character he then also gives us our own lives and therewith he gives us the freedom to make our own decisions within the course of that life. God puts each person in the family, the social and governmental setting, the financial and physical condition which it pleases him to see us in. We may say it is not fair to be born into a particular family situation, or economic circumstance, or some physical or mental disability. What each person is expected to do is to seek and serve God regardless of the facts and regardless of the surrounding circumstances.

When we attempt to demand that God explain and justify his purposes, we are in fact attempting to lift up ourselves to the position of god's. We believe that our understanding of the situation and circumstance is equal to that of God himself and that our own determination of what is right and just and fair should be the standard for basing God's own decision. The Bible states time and time again, that God does not justify himself and he does not answer to man. He works out all things according to the pleasure of his own will, and that includes the creation of man, and establishing his paths. God, unlike us, is omniscient and omnipresent, his understanding of everything is perfect; not only today but also as it relates to tomorrow and eternity itself. We are required to base our understanding of all things within the context of love and faith in the righteousness and grace of God. See Rom. 11: 33-36.

History and our own personal acquaintances are filled with examples of those who still retain to themselves the responsibility to determine what is to be fair and just, and anything which occurs contrary to those standards in their eyes serves as an indictment of God. It is these person's which most prominently stand as examples of what the scriptures describe as "vessels of dishonor".

God is omniscient and knows our path and our decision within specific circumstances and situations; he knows our weaknesses and our strengths. He knows our tomorrow just as he knows our yesterday and today. He directs the paths of those who reject him just as he does the paths of those who accept him and serve him. Thus he orders and directs the steps of the rebellious just as he does the righteous. The end result of both those paths for evil and for good all have the purpose of fulfilling God's ultimate will and plan; which involves giving glory to his righteousness in judgment upon iniquity; and in love calling a chosen people unto himself in grace.

O LORD I know that the way of a man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. [Jer. 10: 23]

Man's goings are of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own ways. [Prov. 27: 15]

Why God allows evil people to do evil things, and allows evil to continue and prevail at least for a certain period in history is within God's will. Balaam is one of the best examples of this. God sent an angel to slay Balaam because he refused to listen to God's instruction regarding not going to the kings who had sent for him to curse Israel. However God then opened the eyes of Balaam's donkey and allowed his life to be saved and Balaam continued on and met with the king. Balaam never did curse the people of Israel and in fact he blessed them before the kings who had sent for him. Still because of his heart and desire for self-interest instead of true love for the will of God, he gave the kings instruction on how to weaken Israel and their relationship with God, when he could not curse them himself. It was this plan of Balaam which was one of the major stumbling blocks to Israel in their relationship with God. Balaam said to give their daughters to the children of Israel to take as wives. He knew that these daughters would bring their own gods and worship of them, and pull the hearts of Israel away from the commandment of God to worship only himself. It is easy to say God should have killed Balaam when he first left on his donkey to meet with the kings. Balaam and his counsel was used to test Israel; and in the flow of history, Israel's national character was shaped and developed through that experience and led Israel along the particular path it followed as a people, and according to God's own plan and purpose not only as relates to the nation of Israel but in his plan and purpose for all the people of the earth to be blessed.

The fact that God knows our final path and the decisions we will make through the course of our life in no way serves to negate our own personal responsibility during the process. We may have predispositions and attitudes in our heart which are given to us by God; these may be areas of strength or flaws and thus areas of weakness and struggle for us. Despite this we make our own decisions and allow these different factors which may or may not have any control over dictate to us in the areas which we do have the freedom to choose. The choice which is right may not itself be easy; or seem like what will benefit us presently, but still the ability to make that decision and to weigh that choice still rests within us individually. When we look back at our lives and review the times which we have sinned, we must all acknowledge the choice we made at the time

was our own. We sin because we follow after our own desires and lusts. See a further discussion related to Temptations.

Of course when we make a decision, and sin, there can be far reaching implications beyond what we may realize or contemplate at the time. A young man listens to his friends and takes a few drinks at a party, and get drunk. He could drive home, and in the process kill himself, or even a number of other people. Each one of these events would have life shattering consequences on many people, and the full effects might never be fully known or appreciated. But even if the young man made it home and nothing of consequence occurred that night, yet he may suddenly discover he has a desire he can't seem to control to drink again. The latent inclination toward alcoholism is awakened by that one innocent experience. At that point a life which had seemingly unlimited potential in any number of areas may suddenly be pulled down through the effects of that awakened addiction. If that alcoholism is never adequately addressed then eventually there will be effects on those around him. His family and friends will have that one drink affect their own lives in a number of ways as much as if he had the wreck and died himself that first night.

Vessels of dishonor are creatures of their own choice. Some reach that state through never reaching beyond their current circumstance which they feel they were placed in life through economic, social, or some other outside disadvantage. Others are just as much vessels of dishonor who live in the best homes, and drive the newest cars, and attend the finest schools. They like their disadvantaged brethren never see the need to reach beyond their current circumstances. Whether in riches or in squalor, the heart of each must turn toward God, in the absence of that move, both are in the same position in the eyes of God.

God has a purpose for every man that goes beyond just merely some final eternal judgment. God's judgment is executed in a number of different ways and degrees as previously discussed. Just as the Lord directly sends a prophet to bring a message to a people, he directs the paths of the evil doers to bring about his will in a similar fashion. Often one evil person is used to execute vengeance on someone else just as bad, or worse, or even better than themselves.

... deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword; From men which are thy hand, O LORD, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life... As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake, with thy likeness. [Ps. 17: 13-15]

Every person is classified before God as vessel of honor or of dishonor based on their own lives and conduct, along with the character of their hearts. Having parents who lived as good of a life as could be expected, and who themselves are accepted before God, does not mean the next generation will stand in the same position with God. Relying on parents and family religious history alone for justification, is equivalent to relying on wealth, social standing, or your own self-righteous works, in the sight of God.

Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial, they knew not the LORD... Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD; for men abhorred the offering of the LORD... [Eli] said unto them, why do ye such things? For I know of your evil doings by all this people... If one man sin against another the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the LORD who shall entreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them. [I Sam. 2: 12-25]

Many people will be declared vessels of dishonor despite having all the outward ornamentation of what man would interpret as righteousness. Their actions appear in perfect conformity with the laws. Yet their hearts are not seeking after God, but rather desiring after iniquity. Their mouths say all the right words, yet their hearts have been hardened. Unto individuals and even groups or churches, whose hearts are not set upon God's grace but rather on outward justification and glory he will give them false doctrine which will have the effect of hardening their hearts to God's true will even more. Once again this is the type of vessels of dishonor which has least opportunity to open their own hearts and make the choice which could lead them out of damnation and back into true grace. See Traditions and Legalism for further discussion. See also II Tim. 3:5-7, II Peter 2:14-22, II Cor. 3:14-15, Eph. 6:24.

... For as much as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me. And their fear of me is taught by precept of men; therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work... wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid. Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD... they say, who seeth us? And who knoweth us? Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as potter's clay; for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? Or shall the thing framed say unto him that framed it, He had no understanding? [Isa. 29: 13-16]

For I have not sent them, saith the LORD, yet they prophesy a lie in my name; that I might drive you out, and that ye might perish, ye and the prophets that prophesy unto you. [Jer. 27: 15]

What is it that causes man not to accept the grace of God by faith? The answers are varied. It begins as previously discussed with the heart of each man as given by God himself. Next it relates to how man himself develops his own character with the strengths and the weaknesses which he is given. Finally it is on the basis of our developed character which leads us in the judgments which we make and the decisions and choices which we make as we proceed through our individual lives. All these factors lead to the point where we face the choice of turning to God in faith, and submitting our character and seeking instead to be formed in Christ's will and purpose and not our own. We must leave what we know and those things which after the flesh we put our hope and strength in, and instead, take hold on the promises, which to the world is foolishness.

The word of God expressed through the salvation message becomes the foundation upon which we required to stand. The world puts its faith upon wealth, power, in the flesh; the world looks to education and philosophy to state what is truth and what is man's purpose within himself and within this world. In the final analysis it is the world and man justifying himself and his existence within the world. The world is concerned with itself its own existence with what it can see, feel, touch, and understand through the five senses. What Christ does in his call is to awaken man's heart to a relationship outside himself and beyond this world, to a city which has eternal foundations whose builder and maker is God. Christ points man to be a servant, to a spirit of meekness, and humility, and to turn the other cheek; in the sight of God a man must die before he can hope to live.

For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe... Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. [I Cor. 1: 21, 24]

Man is most blinded in coming to a relationship with Christ, when their own personal morality serves as the basis for their justification. Regardless of how sincere and heartfelt this desire is, it must stand in contrast with God's law and righteousness. In the end no man will stand justified through their own works. The belief that God will be unrighteous not to accept them in all their kindness, and service to others, is nothing more than a gentile version of Pharisees righteousness. God already stated that the Pharisee will not stand before judgment in justification based on the law; neither will any other person or group based on conformity with their own interpretation of righteousness and good works. Worldly philosophy and moral systems eventually serve merely as an opiate to sooth the conscience of the adherent, to turn away from the word of God as revealed in Christ, and yet feel they can still be justified in their own minds. See Rom. 1:21-22 and I Cor. 1:18-28, no flesh should glorify in his presence (their own works, wisdom, goods).

I thank thee O' Father... that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes... for so it seemed good in thy sight. [Luke 10:22]

... walk not as other gentiles walk, in the vanity of their own mind. Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart. [Eph. 4: 17-18] Ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth... So do these also resist the truth, men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. [II Tim. 3: 7-8]

When the call of God goes out it is calling man unto obedience, as the servant, as the creation. Many hearts find it impossible to accept they should bow their knee to someone higher than they. They refuse to accept the higher power. Philosophy and especially science is based on the proposition that man, and this universe are the highest arbitrators of authority and thus place within man the responsibility for himself and to set

forth his own way. They all accept that there is righteousness and “the good” yet their heart refuses to acknowledge the truth and righteousness resides with Christ, and unto him and his righteousness every man is judged, and before him every knee shall bow and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord.

And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient, where unto also they were appointed. [I Peter 2: 8]

... they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. And this cause God shall send them a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. [II Thes. 2: 10-12] ... for all men have not faith. [II Thes. 3:2]

Study to show thyself approved unto God... rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings, for they increase unto more ungodliness. And their word does eat as a canker... who concerning the truth have erred, saying the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some [lead them to sin]. Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal. The Lord knoweth them that are his. And let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also wood and earth; and some to honor and some to dishonor. If a man purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work. Flee also youthful lusts, but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace... out of a pure heart. But foolish unlearned questions avoid knowing they do gender strife... in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance, to acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will. [II Tim. 2: 15-26] lead captive foolish women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts. [II Tim. 3: 6]

The call of God goes out to the whole of mankind. It finds its full expression in the word of God, and is communicated to the world through preaching, just as prophets came and brought God's word to Israel and other nations. God's glory is shown forth unto all mankind; through the sun and moon in the sky. God's righteousness is also exhibited to all man whether it is the conscience speaking directly to the heart; or whether it is the law given to all people in various measures. All these various methods testify to God and his love calling man to seek after him, to look for him, and seek after his revelation. The fact is that God's call is for the greatest measure either ignored outright or when it is heard rejected quickly without ever having any further consideration being given to the matter.

The relationship of God's calling to the world through his word is expressed most accurately in the parable of the sower. God's word is represented as seed. The seed is distributed out on all the ground of this world, which is the hearts of men. The seed falls upon roadside or other stony ground, which has no ability or desire to receive the word of righteousness, and thus the calling has no effect. The second type of ground is that with shallow soil, which receives the word, accepts it as God's righteousness speaking to their heart, yet there is no depth and once trouble comes, and other considerations arise, the comprehension and awareness of God fades away and no motivation exists to take up that burden of responsibility towards God. The third type of soil is good ground, which has the ability to sustain a walk with God, to develop the attributes which God's righteousness requires. Yet the person on whose ground the seed falls does not take care to cultivate their relationship, they let other things also grow there, they give place to weeds and thistles and before long the seed of God's calling is totally uprooted or what still is allowed to remain serve only as a mere public acknowledgment of what the word is known to represent and can be pointed to if the owner of the ground feels obligated to justify his vineyard to those around him. Yet there is no ability for the seed of God's word to grow and to be productive; it only stands as a barren withering vine. The final type of man's soil is like the previous form, in that it also has productive potential, and is fertile, yet in conjunction with that soil's potential in itself, the person themselves take personal involvement and initiative to cultivate the seed of the calling. They actively seek to make the seed as productive as their field will allow; they take care to eliminate every weed and plant which would try to grow and interfere with the growth and development of the fruitfulness of the seed which springs forth. Even here not every field will bring forth with equal fruitfulness yet all God requires is we be as productive as we are able based on our best effort directed towards him.

It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing, the word I speak to you are spirit. But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.... Therefore said I [Jesus] unto you that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my father. [John 6: 63-65]

Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye can not hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth.... He that is of God heareth God's words; ye therefore hear them not because ye are not of God. [John 8: 43-47]

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 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. [II Cor. 4: 3-6] The light shineth in darkness but the darkness comprehended it not... [John 1: 4-5]

God's promise is open to all people. If a person can hear the word of God and perceive the call and commandment of God and be converted, thereby accepting Christ and repent, then God because of his faithfulness to his word and promise, would forgive and save them. All that is required is a small bit of grace of God towards each person; otherwise they would never feel that first pull which in turn has the possibility of leading to salvation. As with the different types of ground, the amount of God's grace towards each person can be different. Some may only hear the word in passing once and never be touched again. If a person can open up their ear and heart to the word and accept Christ and his sacrifice, then God will reach out and increase his grace towards an individual as that person with a sincere heart reaches forward seeking after more of God, no matter how small that beginning amount of grace might be.

The discussion of the receipt of God's word is referenced very much in the terms of family. God states that each heart is called in one direction or another either towards the God of righteousness, our heavenly Father; or towards this world, and the prince of this world, which is revealed as the Devil. The process of determining whose father we have is decided by our lives and action and decisions. The end result is that where we stand in regards to our spiritual family relationship will be displayed in our attitude towards righteousness and towards the world. A person, who proposes that he stands solidly with both, does nothing but dilutes himself, because he is in his heart and attitude bound to the world, but only wanting to justify himself outwardly and his own conscience through claiming the receipt of God's grace.

If God were your father you would love me [Jesus] for I proceed forth and come from God... why do you not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word. [John 8: 42-43] see also John 9:27, John 14:7, Acts 13:48.

Ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep... my sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me. [John 10: 26-27] contrast with Acts 22:14 and John 6:64-71. Faithful is he that calleth you, who is also able to do it. [I Thes. 5:24]

Earthly families, peoples, and nations are as a group set forth for the will and purpose of God just as individuals are. They are placed in situations and circumstances which lead to a end which serves the will and purpose of God. Brothers are set forth in just this circumstance in scripture on numerous occasions. One is appointed for honor and the other for dishonor. Abraham had two sons, one after the flesh and one after the promise. Isaac, the second son, was to inherit the promise of God to Abraham. Ishmael the first son, after the flesh as opposed to God's promise, was sent away. Though great nations were to come from Ishmael, these nations as the history of the Bible set out were all unto dishonor. After that Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau, one unto honor and another to dishonor. One son, Esau, was concerned only with this life and what he could receive in the present, based on this attitude he sold his birthright for a bowl of soup. The other son, Jacob, had a desire for the things of the father; he sought after the birthright and after the blessings.

It is often read that Esau was predestined to fail even before he was born. As already discussed what we have to remember is God's view and reference is based on eternity, the past, present and future all unified in one knowledge. God states what is not yet as though it already has been. Thus God did not force Esau to sell his birthright, yet he knew before Esau was born that based on his character the effects of his attitude and desires and their effect on the choices he made in his life that he would give up his promise for some bread. What is true though is that God placed Esau in a circumstance which resulted in him making the decision he did relinquishing his promise. Esau selling his birthright was part of God's plan, just as Jacob's brothers selling him into captivity, and Judas betraying Christ. Each event was part of God's preordained plan of revelation and development, yet at each time no one took any action which it was not of their own free choice and desire, at the time. They were lead and directed to their decision based on their own heart. God glories in taking people's own hearts, and their decisions, and the effects of those decisions on others, yet bringing all these together for the fulfillment of his will, and the glorification of his chosen people.

What often confuses the issues of predestination, foreknowledge, and judgment revolves around the sovereignty of God to harden hearts and blind understanding. As discussed in the area of Judgment God reserves this right to himself. Once a person, or even a government have made their own decision and established their path, God through his authority is able to give them over to the Devil, or even to send his own angels to dilute an individual's thinking, or to corrupt the advice of those around the person, to make wrong seem right. He hardens the heart of whom he will so that they further his purposes, even when they do not intend that effect. All things work together, even the workers of iniquity, for the good of those who love God. As opposed to working to open an individual's heart and mind, he leads vessels of dishonor entirely into iniquity so there is no understanding of the need to change, and even more fundamentally absolutely no desire to change their path out of the sin they are in.

(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy to whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. [Rom 9: 11-18] see also Gen. 25: 23.

And we know that all things work together for the good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose. [Rom. 9: 28].

When you look at vessels of honor, the scriptures deal with them in the same type of terminology. However when you look at the actual application of these terms, predestination, foreordained, and elect, they are all applied in the context of continued choice and decision on the part of those individuals. The difference between dishonor and honor revolves around the element of grace, extended or withheld in the heart and lives of each group. As set forth in the forgoing scripture that element is within the sole discretion of the Creator himself. All have sinned; the issue of grace hinges upon coming out of that sin, or remaining in that condition of enmity with God. It is within the authority of a person to remain within the grace of God through the active requirement of faith. See further discussion of Faith and Faith and Works. It is the same independent element of choice which leads to the decision of man to rebel against the word of God, the hardening of the heart of man and darkening of understanding ensures that no turning towards God will occur and thereby seals that person's state of sin.

God knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation and reserve the unjust unto day of judgment to be punished.. [II Peter 2:9]

The final element of vessels of dishonor involves the principal applied to government, as opposed to individuals. When you read the Old Testament the scriptures are replete with references to nations which will be destroyed for their various actions. These countries are predestined to dishonor just as a person is, through the fact that their actions past, present and future are appraised by God when making his charge. Many nations referenced no longer exist, still other nations continue even today, yet just as God's word will never fail, those nations will receive the judgment which is reserved for them. However the Lord uses those nations reserved unto dishonor for his own plan and purposes. They have been and will be used to chastise his people, Israel, and even persecute and test his elect, the church. But even if they are given dominance and evil should triumph for an hour, yet the judgment of God upon those same nations is still sure.

... Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the LORD... Now be ye not stiffnecked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the LORD... serve the LORD your God, that the fierceness of this wrath may turn away fro you. For if ye turn again unto the LORD, your brethren and children shall find compassion before them, that lead them captive... for the LORD your God is gracious and merciful and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him. [II Chron. 30: 6-9]

God places specific individuals in charge of nations. To fulfill his plan these individual work both a purpose in their individual judgment and can help bring about the judgment of God upon the nation which they govern. Pharaoh is given as one example of God putting a certain man in a certain position all for the purpose of God showing forth his power to his people. Principalities and powers are present in heaven just as in earth, and in a similar fashion God uses these same organizations and their leader [Satan] in their sin and rebellion for his eternal purpose. Satan represents the "perfect" example of this principle. Satan was created by God, and he was known from the very beginning

to have the nature and character of a murderer and a liar. Despite all this, God also made him with unique beauty and wisdom, and gave him an exalted position within heaven's governmental structure. Satan's pride and the decision to rebel against God, and to cause mankind to sin in the Garden of Eden, and continuing until today, all were result of Satan's own free choice and self-will to exalt himself. What God glories in is taking what Satan in his heart meant for evil and using that to accomplish his greater ultimate purpose of love in drawing a separated people to himself.

...He [God] hardened pharaoh's heart... [Ex. 7:3] For this cause [God] raised [Pharaoh] up, for to show in [Pharaoh] my power; and that [God's] name would be declared throughout all the earth. [Ex. 19: 6]

God's Mercy and [Law of] Grace

Previously we discussed what could be viewed as the negative aspect of grace. The more accurate expression would be the alternative choice in the expression of grace. For every positive there is a negative. Thus when faced with a decision there is a "yes" and a "no". As stated earlier without choice no judgment is possible. Without the necessity of judgment, the element of grace is never manifest. Following we will discuss the positive aspects of grace; its necessity, its purpose, and how it is effectuated in the lives of men.

Without grace every man stands condemned before God in his sin. It is that grace which makes a way of reconciliation between sinful man and a holy God. Sin represents an offense against God. It is the opposition to righteousness, as expressed in God's revealed word, beginning with a simple instruction not to partake in a simple single act, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Man violated this simple command; through self-interest, pride, and rebellion. God continued to reveal himself to a greater and fuller extent through his word, and its expression in the law. Yet here also man's sinful nature continued to express itself through self-centeredness; pride, and rebellion. God's righteousness pointed man towards love of God first, and then love of your neighbor as yourself. Yet man constantly rejected these mandates of righteousness and let sin prevail in their hearts and actions. In this manner, refusing to follow after God's word, judgment was required as a consequence to the injury to God's righteousness. Grace is the method of recognizing the necessity of judgment in response to the violation of righteousness. What Grace does is through love God pays the price; he bears the cost, for the offense suffered against himself. The law set forth a specific consequence for sin, a cost which each man stands responsible individually to pay for the violation of God's righteousness; that cost is death. Because of God's love and mercy towards man; he provided himself, in the form of Christ after the flesh, to pay the price set forth for sin. Man created in the image of God, through his own choice separated himself from the preordained relationship which God had desired with man. Through Christ's sacrifice God made a way to re-establish communion with man, by taking upon

himself a person's offense; when that person lays his or her sins before the Lord in repentance and faith.

It was through grace that man was made aware of the fullness of God's righteousness, through the Jewish law. Judgment from God can and in fact did come upon the whole world without ever having the fullness of God's revealed righteousness, manifest through the law. The Bible describes the times of Noah as men's imaginations being continually evil in the sight of God. God did retain to himself still one righteous man in this time, Noah, whom he saved along with his family by grace. Yet all the rest of mankind was destroyed by the flood without any indication that the law, at least in the fullness of its expression as given to Israel, was ever available to the world prior to the flood to turn their hearts from their evil ways.

Following the flood, God gave Noah a promise, that through his mercy he would never again destroy the world by water. God's grace was extended when he established his covenant with Abraham, through him and his children, and the nation of Israel, God prepared to reveal himself in the fullness of his righteousness. God's giving of the law to Israel, even though it still had the effect of working death through condemnation, yet its revealed understanding of righteousness pointed the way toward God, and eventually unto grace revealed in Christ Jesus..

And what one nation in the earth is like thy people Israel, whom God went to redeem to be his own people, to make them a name of greatness and terribleness... whom thou hast redeemed out of Egypt? For thy people Israel didst thou make thine own people for ever; and thou LORD becamest their God. [I Chron. 17: 21-22]

... when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars... should be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the LORD thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven. But the LORD hath taken you and brought you out... to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day... Take heed unto yourselves lest ye forget the covenant of the LORD your God... For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God [unto judgment/chastisement] ... But if from thence [your sins] thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul... (For the LORD thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee; neither destroy thee; nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he swear unto them. [Duet. 4: 19-31]

For thou art a holy people... the LORD thy God hath chosen [you] to be a special people unto himself, above all the people that are upon the face of the earth... for ye were the fewest of all people; But because the LORD loved you... know therefore that the LORD thy God he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him, and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; and repayeth them that

hate him to their face; to destroy them; he will not be slack to him that hatest him, he will repay him to his face. [Duet. 7: 6-10]

He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivereth me, because he delighted in me... Therefore the LORD hath recompensed me according to my righteousness; according to my cleanness in his eye sight. With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful; and with the upright man thou wilt show thyself upright. With the pure thou wilt show thyself pure; and with the forward thou wilt show thyself upright. And the afflicted people thou wilt save; but thin eyes are upon the haughty, that thou mayest bring them down. [II Sam. 22: 20-28]

What grace accomplished through Christ was to bring the element of mutual choice in God's relationship to man. God has chosen certain men; such as he has revealed himself to their hearts; through the preaching of the gospel to receive his promise. Yet what he has also established is that the call would go out in love; and the heart of a man would through God's grace be open to receive. Yet each man is still free to make his own decision as to how to react to the call. It is the response, asking what must I do to be saved, and then how he responds when the answer is given; that is what builds the bond upon which God's grace is fully effectuated.

God's grace provides a door to that mutuality of love. God gives us our basic heart and attitude towards himself and his law. But as already discussed the importance of how we live our lives and allow our attitudes and desires to develop places a crucial role in our love of God and of his word and righteousness. God responds in increasing grace in response to the heart that is reaching towards him in a spirit of love and appreciation.

O how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men... Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD. [Ps. 31: 19, 24]

... Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? [James 2: 5]

The limits of God's grace are only set forth and known by God himself. For everything there is a season, that principle applies to grace as well. In the overall season of God's will, judgment turns to grace; yet eventually grace will turn back to judgment again. Once that season changes there is nothing man can do to turn back the clock; and when Christ reigns as the king of Israel, just as the Jews hoped and believed at his first arrival, upon his second coming the Lion of Judah will rule with a rod of iron in righteousness and judgment.

Within the dispensation of grace itself, the limits of God's grace extended towards each individual is also subject to the principle of seasons. Not every person is entitled or

in fact will receive the same amount of grace which someone else might receive in their own life. Grace is a gift of God, and how much and to whom that gift is given remains part of the sovereignty of the Lord. Each and every time we feel the hand of God moving us to repentance and the spirit of conviction come upon us, we should be thankful and listen to that call, and most importantly we should respond to it. No man is guaranteed a second call of God unto grace. If we base our salvation on the idea that we will wait a little longer and later at some point we will turn our souls toward God and later on establish our paths in his, we are playing a dangerous game. The problem with this approach is twofold. First God knows our hearts thoughts and attitudes what God glorifies in is taking our “plans” and turning them around on us. Therefore the attitude of “wait til later” is subject to the possibility God will harden our heart so we never desire to repent in the future. The second alternative is that right before the time we have set for ourselves to finally walk in God’s path, he might draw our path to a end itself, and then we will still stand before God in the fullness of our soon-to-be repented of sins.

The question arises again, why does God show grace? First is because he does love man. What greater love does a person have than that he lays down his life for a friend; Jesus became the living expression of God’s love for man. The Lord never gives man a commandment, or a burden to bear, which he had not taken upon himself already. Second, the Lord receives the greatest praise and glory because of his boundless and unmerited grace towards us. All through eternity the saints shall lift up and glorify our savior and redeemer who suffered and died that we might find reconciliation and salvation. All creation shall praise him and lift him up because of his faithfulness in grace.

For thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; an let thy glory be above all the earth. [Ps. 57: 10-11]

For the LORD will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance. [Ps. 94: 14]

Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of the heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; an thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. [Micah 7: 18-19]

Through God’s grace, his hands of love are continually reaching out to his creation in all our failings both in the flesh and in our spirit. God’s grace is not a one time experience; in fact God’s grace is a continual renewing and calling us back unto him in love. Grace, in the aspect of unmerited and unearned love, is the ultimate manifestation of God’s love for his people. It becomes the bridge in relationship, just as Christ was the bridge in the flesh; in this context it is the reconciling of perfect holiness to imperfection. Man is saved by the work of Christ; through him we are justified and sanctified before God. We are not, and in fact never can be, through the righteousness of

our own efforts or by our own work, worthy of God's love and the privilege of relationship which he offers to us.

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; [Titus 2: 11-12]

And hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus. [Eph. 2: 6-7]

Jesus Christ became the bridge of grace which spanned the transom of man's sin, and which separated mankind from a righteous God. God's eternal plan was fulfilled in Christ, this revelation in the flesh of the salvation foretold by the prophets, the Root of David through whom all the world would be blessed. God made flesh, he died for a sinful world that whomsoever would hear his voice and answer him in faith could find reconciliation and salvation.

For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and known surely that I came out of thee; and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them, I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine... Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are... [John 17: 8-12]

... to this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. [John 19: 37]

When Jesus came he did not come to call men after the flesh, but rather his call was unto the heart of man. Israel was already bound after the flesh unto the law, they gloried in outward righteousness, without giving regard to the heart of the person. That is why the leaders of the Jews would not accept him in his spirit and in his message. When Jesus came his spirit was meek, lowly, and humble. He brought a message of deliverance and salvation but that message was unto the heart and mind of man; Israel was looking for deliverance but after the flesh from Rome, not from the hardness of their own hearts. Even today, Christ still calls to the heart of man drawing him unto repentance from sin. To hear the call man must himself have a broken spirit; a heart that is thirsty for the living water which comes only from Christ Jesus.

For see your calling brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; God hath chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise... [I Cor. 1: 26-27]

The calling of grace is free in that it can not be earned or purchased but it goes out freely unto all that will receive. At the very same time however this call of grace is at a great cost. Only those who are willing to pay the price will receive the final reward. The price to God was taking on the form of man, becoming flesh and ultimately becoming sin for us that we could find salvation. We can understand and appreciate the sacrifice after the flesh, the crown of thorns upon his head, the stripes upon his back, the nails in his hand and feet, the spear finally piercing his side. All this after the flesh he suffered for us as the sacrifice for our sins. What we often do not appreciate is that because of his love he took upon himself the sin of all mankind; he drank of the cup of all the sin which were committed before his death, and all the sin of those who later come unto him committed after his death. How many of us, just reading the newspaper or listening to the news of the radio, could or would be willing to accept ourselves the offenses which we hear about, robbery, lying, rape, murders, indecency, unnatural affections, all the crimes and hurts which arise out of others sins. What person would be willing to take the responsibility for all these actions and for their consequences, the guilt that all these different people bear for their sins? Not many would desire to take up that challenge; and the very few who might be willing would not be morally able because of their own sins. Yet the one perfect man, Jesus Christ, who was born without sin, and despite all the same trials and temptations which we have all faced lived his life without the stain of sin, was forced at one specific point in time to take upon himself the iniquity and unrighteousness and abominations of all mankind through all time.

Just as grace is costly to God, the same is true with regard to the recipient of this gift. The grace of God through Christ Jesus is a calling out; a beckoning unto service, unto a country which we have not seen but through the eyes of faith know it awaits those who follow him. Grace is a light of love shining forth into the darkness of the world calling the sinner unto salvation. It is grace which allows us to hear and receive God's call to our life. But it is not a call which upon the hearing alone brings about salvation, and justification before God. Jesus call of grace is a beckoning to leave where we are at and to follow him. Jesus call unto the apostles was to get up from their nets to follow him, and become fishers of men. The call of God is always unto action, to forsake our sin, and to put on Christ and his righteousness. We are commanded to put away our sins in repentance, but also we are commanded to take up our cross and to follow him, to put his yoke upon us. Through grace, Christ calls unto himself a peculiar people separate from the world.

*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men...
Our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us
from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of
good works. [Titus 2: 11-14]*

Too often we are given to suppose that grace is the blank check of God, that God has obligated himself to turn his head from all our sins. Nothing is required of us but because of God's limitless love for us his creation and because of the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ, merely believing or at least professing to believe will be all that is required for God to wrap his arm around us and invite us into his eternal presence. For others,

they believe that faith of some form or fashion or another regarding Christ as the living Lord and Savior is required, but once that requirement is met grace makes their calling and election sure regardless of any sin which might arise subsequently. Many will be confused and bewildered as Christ says depart from me ye workers of iniquity, even as they hold up their profession and reliance upon God's declared grace to justify themselves before their Creator.

Just as grace cost God in Christ giving up his life to save us from our sins. Grace is the privilege, the opportunity, to accept the call of God, which he summons us to laying down our old man of the flesh, our lusts, our self-will, our justification of ourselves, and to submit our hearts and our lives to his call and his will. His call is to forsake ourselves. He calls us to be hated by the world. He calls us unto persecution for his names sake. He calls us to love those who despitefully use us. He calls us to forgive even as we are forgiven ourselves. The cost of grace is the cost of our lives, in love, just as Christ gave his in the same spirit.

Not every man will be saved, by the grace of the Lord. Because the cost is as described above is great, and not many will choose to accept the price associated with grace extended. But still others will not be given the same opportunity to receive the call of God. As referenced in Vessels of Dishonor some will not have a heart as open to receive the call of God as others; still others will have their heart hardened and their conscience seared so they can not understand their need for repentance, or that the condition they are in is indeed sin, they actually believe they are within God's will themselves.

The question then is often posed, how can a holy and righteous God extend grace in greater abundance and measure to some persons, families, and even nations than to others? The fact that God does distinguish between individuals becomes the basis for many peoples justification not to accept Christ as Savior and Lord. This approach most closely follows the principle of cutting off your nose to spite your face. God does not and never supposes to have to justify himself and his decision to his creation. We can reject God based on how we attempt to judge his decisions; but that does not affect God himself, the only thing this accomplishes is to separate us by our own choice from the grace which God extends to us.

What we are required to do is to accept God, through Christ. We are forced to submit ourselves, our will, our judgment, unto his will and his judgment. It is through Christ and Christ alone, that God has established salvation. Many people feel that God would not limit his salvation to just one way, and through acceptance of one "man". But when God took on the form of flesh and died for our sins, he required that every man should find salvation and reconciliation with him through Christ Jesus. This is another basis which God forces us to make a choice, to submit ourselves to him, by accepting him, his sacrifice, and his Lordship through Christ Jesus. Our pride and self-will must be given up, to accept Jesus as Lord.

Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh. And declared to be the Son of God with power... by the resurrection from the dead; by whom we have received grace... for the obedience to the faith... for his name... are ye also the called of Jesus Christ. [Rom. 1: 2-6]

But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. [Eph. 4: 7]

For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell. [Col. 1: 19]

We must give our paths over to him, in faith and love that he will faithfully keep us and maintain our way, even if it is trials, tribulation, and persecution. It is God's perfect will and eternal plan which are being accomplished. God's will and that plan is much greater than you or I. What God desires is through grace, that we would be a part of that plan.

Time and eternity are created by God. God works through history and through man, family, and nations, to accomplish his purpose. That purpose is to call a select and chosen people unto himself. God glories in taking a small part out of whole, and in turn taking that seemingly small insignificant part, and through his grace and power, lifting it up and glorifying it among the rest of creation. In the flesh God accomplished this in the form of the nation of Israel, and he will continue his work into the future in that area. But God's plan and will extends beyond just this present world and the earthly nation of Israel. God's plan is eternal, the riches of his grace, will be shown forth throughout eternity, and in the new heaven and new earth in greater dominions and principalities yet to be revealed. See New Heaven/ New Earth. However to show forth his majesty in power in calling some unto himself, there is the factual necessity of those which are not lifted up, the great majority of creation against which the Lord's glory and righteousness is contrasted against. These vessels of clay and brick are contrasted against the vessels of gold, and silver. Some are made for the master's house and others are to be cast away and burned in the fire. God as Lord of all creation exercises his own divine prerogative as to how, to whom, and to what extent he decides to extend grace to any particular individual or even as a group, as seems good in his own eyes. See Rom.11: 33-36, Rom. 9:18-23 (As Creator and Sovereign God), I Peter 1:9-10, Eph. 4:7, II Thes. 2:13, II Tim. 1: 9; II Tim. 2:18, James 1:18, Eph. 1: 9-12, I Tim. 2:3; Ps. 135: 4-13; Isa. 29: 14-16; Isa 30: 8-14; Jer. 18: 2-12.

... thou [Moses] hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name. [Ex. 33: 17]

... [I, God] will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will shew mercy to whom I will shew mercy. [Ex. 33: 19] ... And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. [Acts 2: 47]

... I will answer thee, that God is greater than man why dost thou strive against him? For he giveth not account of any of his matters. [Job 33: 12-13]

I have made the earth, the man, and the beast that are upon the ground, by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemeth meet unto me. [Jer. 27: 5]

The doctrine of predestination is similar to that of election relating to the principle of grace. Each says that once an individual has been approved by God their fate is set forth by God himself, they basically have no decision to make because God will make sure that their path will lead them to the correct final destination which God himself has selected for them. The Bible does make mention of predestination; however, these scriptures must be read and understood with all the teaching and examples of the Bible given to us.

According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. Having predestined us unto adoption of Children by Jesus Christ unto himself according to the good pleasure of his will. To the praise of the glory of his grace. Wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace... he hath abounded to us in all wisdom, and prudence, having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself. In whom we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. [Eph. 1:4-11]

... Give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things [add to your faith, virtue, knowledge, etc...], ye shall never fail. [II Peter 3:8-10]

God is eternal and infinite and his perspective and viewpoint is vastly different from our own. See discussion of God as a sphere. He exists at all times, and in all places, at the same time simultaneously. He speaks of tomorrow as though it already has occurred. Yet he deals with us, and relates to us, each one, where we stand today. What God does is to know our paths, and to establish them before we begin our walk, he knows what our attitudes and decisions will be before we are formed in the womb, he knows our love for him and his word; he also knows our pride and rebellion. He does not force us to love him, yet he knows who will. When we are faced with the opportunity to the call of grace in our lives he knows how we will react. Based on our heart and our choices he can and will blind the hearts of some; and lead others into deception, and give them over to their own imaginations in judgment. As discussed in Vessels of Dishonor this judgment is the culmination of the choices made in the person's own life.

The LORD looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men... He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works... Behold the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy... Our soul waiteth for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. For our heart shall rejoice in him, because we have trusted in his holy name. Let thy mercy, O LORD, be upon us, according as we hope in thee. [Ps. 33: 13-22]

For whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son... moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified and whom he justified, they he also glorified. [Rom. 8: 29-30]

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ; Grace unto you, and peace be multiplied... according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead... we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time. [I Peter 1: 2-5]

Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world. [Acts 15: 18]

God has a plan, a will, and a purpose, all of which will be accomplished. The thought that just a particular person, besides Christ himself, was required to accomplish God's will is to elevate our individual importance beyond what can be sustained by scripture. What God does know is how we will respond, and through his grace, he can keep us from temptation which we might succumb to. God is also able through his grace to sustain us in our times of temptation and deliver us. He will use us for his purpose, if we submit ourselves to him in faith. What God desires from us is that submission. Once he finds a submissive heart he can make of that what he desires, he can place that heart into the situation and circumstance to fulfill that purpose and circumstance which he predestined to exist before the world began. Even Christ in the flesh had to make a decision, whether to accept the cup which God desired him to drink out of, Calvary. He prayed and asked that he be delivered from the sacrifice which was set before him, yet at the same time he brought his flesh under submission to the will of God, and said not my (fleshly) will by thy (God's eternal) will be done. Choice was still the crucial element which brought forth salvation to man. Contrast to that the story of Ester, she was faced with the choice of going before the king uninvited and perhaps being sentenced to death, or she could have remained silent and let her people be massacred. Her uncle understood that she was placed in that position for that particular purpose. The choice she made would be her own. However, if she refused, God would bring forth salvation to her people by another, and she herself would perish. The principle of choice is an integral part of God's relationship with man, and the doctrine of grace will not remove from each man that fundamental freedom to choose.

Grace extended through Christ is the means by which man is taken out from under the curse of the law. Jesus became our sacrifice under the law and the basis that upon accepting Christ into our heart through faith we are justified in the eyes of God. Our sins are removed and we stand before God blameless in his sight. Christ paid the price in love, and no further sacrifice to justify us will be required.

And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus... Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. [I Tim. 1: 14-15] Who will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. [I Tim. 2: 4-6] ... we trust in the living God who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe. [I Tim. 4: 10]

... Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness is accepted with him. [Acts 10: 34-35]

... ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot; who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times... that your faith and hope might be in God. [I Peter 1: 18-21]

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins... God who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us... quickened us with Christ.. [Eph. 2: 1-5] ... who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. [Rom. 8:33]

What is the relationship of grace to families and to nations? It works in much the same fashion and function as it does in the lives of individuals. God choose who and to what extent that grace is extended. What families and nations reflect is really the affects of grace which is offered and then acted upon by different individuals. Because of God's love toward certain individual's such as Abraham and Moses, God extends grace and his promises towards families and nations which, standing in their own merit and attitudes at a particular point in time, would justify God turning them over to judgment, and withdrawing the continuing call of grace.

Parents stand for children and other family members. God respects the relationship of family the bonds, the love, the natural burden which flows from these relationships. This does not mean that every child will be saved because of a praying father or mother. Each person in the final analysis makes their own decision regarding their relationship with God, and there will be those who walk away from the paths which they are raised and never return. But even then those children have a knowledge and understanding of the way back to God, if they so choose to return, and the greatest gift a

parent can give is a roadmap back to grace; this is what a child of a family not raised in righteousness fails to have. Parents stand as priests and intercessors for their children, when a child may be far from God, the prayers of parent can convince God to continue to reach out a hand of grace unto that child. No one is entitled to any specific level of grace, or to have God continue to draw your heart back again unto the light. God desires us to stand for those around us, specifically our family but also our friends and neighbors, in intercession and prayer. Our actions and decisions in accepting Christ, and our actions in furtherance of our faith, open up the door of opportunity for our family to similarly receive the grace of God. Without a parent, or for that matter a child, accepting the call of God, that person's family might not ever have the opportunity to hear and to have their own hearts touched to receive the truth unto salvation.

... Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be save, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house. [Acts 16: 30-34]

God desires to be affected by our prayers in how he makes his decision regarding his authority relating to grace. In the judgment, God will be glorified and receive praise because he heard the prayer of a father and a mother, and brought back sons and daughters which otherwise would have never returned, but instead their hearts found God in love and faith again, as he originally desired and purposed for them. That same grace extends down to subsequent generations, of children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and beyond. In heaven there will be lines of people and families, which go down through history, which are testimonies of God's grace to specific individuals the results of which are continued throughout and carried on through generations. All those who accept Jesus are described as the spiritual seed of Abraham, thus we are recipients of the promise given to that one individual and which has continued through the ages to his children.

For thou [Israel] art an holy people unto the LORD thy God; the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. [Duet. 7: 6]

Simeon [Peter] hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people of his name... all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. [Acts 15: 14, 17]

The grace of God is a dynamic process. It flows from God, in that without the call being received in the heart of a man, it is as if it had never gone out. Therefore it is grace which allows the heart to be open to receive the gift of Christ's sacrifice. At the same time, how does the message, the good news, of Christ's love go forth but by man reaching out to other men. Thus man is given the opportunity, and the responsibility, to

spread the gospel of Christ unto all men. How can man believe in Christ unless they hear, and how can they hear without a preacher? How many souls which were fertile soil for the word of God, yet they never received the seed of God's word? How many families and generations have been affected by missing the opportunity of not having the gospel preached unto them? It is the grace and love of God that commands us to go forth and to send missionaries and pastors to preach the gospel unto all peoples, nations and tongues. It was the grace of God which sent Peter to Cornelius' home to preach the word unto the gentiles. The method of delivering the message, which was accepted with open hearts, was through the submissive faith of man, answering the call of God calling him unto a new place and a new people. Jews were forbidden by their law from having contact and fellowship with gentiles, thus the grace of God once more had the effect to go beyond the law of the flesh, and compel Peter to follow the law of faith written in the heart.

Justification before God (by Faith)

As we have already discussed grace is much more vibrant than what many people today care to acknowledge. When I say vibrant I am referring to the many aspects and facets which are present, in how God grants it unto whom he wills; and to the extent he wills, but also the fact that receiving grace constitutes a calling and requires an acceptance on the part of the recipient of God's grace. Grace comes with a price, to God who gives it and unto the person who receives it.

The same analysis is true in reference to faith. Far too often faith is termed as purely an internal experience, with no direct effect or consequence apparent to the outside world. Faith is thus thought of as an experience purely and personally between a man and his Lord. Faith is the beauty and splendor of the heart feeling that call of grace unto acceptance of Christ. Yet faith is also dynamic, it can not be found acceptable to God as reconciling and justifying man with his Creator, except that faith bring forth fruit and is manifest in action. Grace is the calling or the offer of God to reconcile man unto himself. Faith is the acceptance; it necessitates action based on that acceptance of the call of God. Faith becomes the basis for effectuating a new life for us upon becoming a new creature in Christ Jesus.

The salvation process is best thought of in terms of a contract, between God and man. A contract comprises three main elements, an offer, acceptance, and consideration. Salvation, understood in this way, begins with God; it is he who must always begin the relationship, because it is through his grace that the offer of salvation and reconciliation is brought forth to the heart of man. Faith is the method of acceptance of God's grace. By faith we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior. The final element of the contract, relates to consideration, mere statements alone by both parties to a contract do not without more make an agreement enforceable. Yet when either party acts in reliance on the agreement, then both parties become obligated thereby. God's consideration for grace came in the form of taking on flesh, coming down to mankind, and dying on the cross for our sins. Man's consideration in faith comes forth in crucifying his selfishness, the desires of the flesh, and taking on Christ in love, in his heart and life.

What is faith? The first thing is to understand the principles and the foundations of faith. Faith like grace comes from God. The amount of faith a person has varies, but faith is also something which can grow and develop. The more you understand and appreciate about God's glory, righteousness, judgment, and grace the greater things you can expect to receive, thereby increasing your faith. Faith is founded on a belief which goes beyond what we have already experienced; faith is expectation, yet based on confidence and assurance, of the person or thing we put our faith in. Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen... see Heb 11:1-3, and examples given thereafter.

Faith is not necessarily or totally a spiritual concept. We can have faith in as mundane of things as electricity and utilities. When we turn a switch we have faith that

lights will come on. When we turn the faucet we expect that water will come out. In a more personal relationship we have faith in family, and in friends; generally, we believe those close to us will do what they say they will. Faith deals with the present, and with the future, relating to our conduct and expectation. The past at the most only provides a foundation upon which faith can be based; through our experience.

Some people claim that God would be unjust to judge them because they do not have faith (believe) in him. As we have already discussed God will not justify himself to man, rather each man will have to justify himself before God in judgment. Whether that person themselves, or the vast majority of creation, feel that is “fair” or not. However, the claim a person does not have faith or “believe” is not true, that statement can only be made plausible to the extent it is meant that I do not have faith in or believe in God, or even more specifically they do not believe in God as set forth in the Bible. For these people they have evaluated their heart and their understanding and made the choice that putting their faith in God and the consequences which that choice would require of them is not what they desire. Each person must make that decision for themselves, and accept the results related to it.

Every person does make a decision in their life relating to their faith; they make their choice of what they desire to base their life upon. Their faith is expressed by what they put their effort in life into, their time into, their money into; what they place their confidence in. How different people express their faith can be as varied as the individual themselves. Some people spread themselves thin taking on as many activities as they can squeeze in, others may dedicate themselves to one purpose or objective alone, but regardless of how it is expressed the object of each person’s faith will eventually become manifest. For many people their faith rests totally within themselves. Their whole life and objective centers on caring for themselves; for having the best they can to eat, the best house possible to live in, enjoying as much pleasure as they can find in life. Their focus is totally inward and that is all they have faith in, they look out to others, but only to the extent that those around them can be utilized to further and benefit themselves.

Many people can have faith in other things, extending beyond just purely themselves, for some their faith is in society in what is fashionable in society, what is in vogue, what is currently correct according to current trends. Their faith is thus focused on the society and people around themselves and being found acceptable and approved of by those who they socialize with. Still others place their faith in family, immediate and extended, it is within this group and that their faith and confidence reside.

One of the main basis in which men place their faith, yet failing to acknowledge God, is science. The study of science relates to the physical world its properties, its laws, and the knowledge of man which has developed. Faith is placed in the discoveries of science, each new revelation and development increases that faith, hope, and confidence in man and his knowledge. Even if oneself is to die, the faith is that mankind as a species will carry on develop and carry on what we have contributed something to, even if only to the general genetic pool of future generations.

Science, or rather the people who place their faith in science, has recently been the most active opponents of religion, and thereby God, as a basis of understanding and faith. Science in and of itself is not an opponent of religion. Science is the process of observation and experimentation coming to understanding of the operation of the physical universe. Religion is through study and revelation coming to knowledge of God, both as he relates to the physical universe and eternity.

Many people who argue for the “supremacy” of science over religion, base their premise on the fact that science is based on facts, and observable truths which can be verified. Religion they say is based purely on blind faith, which can not be independently proven or verified empirically. However true science, conclusions which constitute scientific laws, only states what is true today. It can not state with scientific certainty what happened in the past beyond a point of actual observation; further science does not state as absolute truth what will happen in the future. How proponents of science as the absolute basis of truth argue for its supremacy is based on the application of human reason, to explain, how things developed, before true scientific verification was possible, and by the same way it uses reason, to state what will happen in the future. In both these situations, making declarations regarding either the past or the future requires faith, stated in the form of logic or reason or mathematical formulas, to justify a position. Regardless of the label placed on the basis used to make the declaration, the statement is still predicated upon faith.

The Bible states that the heavens themselves declare the glory of God. The beauty and organization of the natural world also points to the supremacy of the Creator. Current scientific theory for the creation of the universe and the biological and climatological systems on earth arose out of an explosion referred to as the “Big Bang”. How the extreme disorder that occurred after this big bang eventually coalesced into the highly organized universe, which we have, are not proven, but rather the fact that they did naturally came together naturally are set forth as various theories and models. What caused and provided the basis for creating order out of chaos, is credited to gravity or other similar scientific explanations. Yet how gravity as a natural law alone without direction behind it is not a reasonable basis for explaining the truly unimaginable degree of complexity present just in the universe itself, and the highly organized and specific structures which make up specific chemical elements. What accounts for the laws which provide the organized structure for the universe is one of the areas of faith, and particularly faith in God. A second issue concerning the Big Bang theory, involves where did this initial particle or where the matter for our initially “densely packed” universe came from. Science takes the assumption that whatever that “something” was, it was already initially there. How it got there or where it came from; science can not address the issue, so it assumes it as a fact (i.e. faith).

Science similarly is forced to make assumptions about the future. It says that scientific laws which are accepted today and assumptions which are correct today will continue to apply equally into the future. No one can argue that this is a eminently reasonable and practical approach which allows us to make projections relating to future events and occurrences. Yet this process is based on our own decision, and not based on

any scientific law itself to prove our assumption relating to the future specifically to be scientifically “true”. Therefore both to prove the past and the future on a scientific basis the proponents are forced to fall back upon faith to support their conclusions.

The final and very basic area which science falls back into faith relates to biology and life itself. Even today there has not been a definitive explanation which proposes to explain how life arose out of basic chemical elements. No one has ever been able to create life without beginning with some other living source. Yet the other major premise of science, the theory of evolution is based on the fact that life spontaneously generated at some point in the past. How it happened, exactly how it progressed initially, science can not explain in any detail. Science thus falls into faith again, that life of some elemental form did manage to spontaneously generate through random chance. Yet faith that an eternal pre-existing God created life intentionally set the universe in order purposefully is rejected as uninformed and unenlightened at the best. Even today the more science itself discovers about the most basic of living cells, shows that they are incredibly more complex than what Darwin himself supposed when he first proposed his theory.

The theory of evolution relates to the creation and form of man himself. Evolution stands for the proposition that through a process of natural selection, and random mutation man developed into what he is today. Man is thus a product of his natural development from lower species. The Bible says that man was created by and formed in the image of God. What creationists and evolutionists agree on whether they know it or not is that each relies on faith. The faith of each without question comes from a different source and point of view, yet faith indeed is what each rests on. The question has been asked when God made Adam did he have a belly button. This question appears silly but in some ways it is highly relevant. If a group of evolutionary biologists were created by God soon after Adam instead of Eve (I’m sure Adam would have been against this proposition) what would have been their opinion? If they were the product of today’s scientific method they likely would take hair and DNA samples and run other scientific tests. Likely they would conclude that Adam possessed both an X and Y chromosome and that his genetic markers would make it possible to authoritatively identify both his mother and father if only they were available for testing. But if Adam didn’t have a belly button wouldn’t that give the skeptic no alternative but to acknowledge that Adam didn’t have a mother? Alternatively, if the evolutionary scientist gave Adam a physical and found he did have a belly button would that be conclusive proof, in addition to his DNA and other physical evidence, that Adam had in fact been born and that the scientists were just unable to locate his parents? The answer to both these arguments, whether he did or didn’t have a bellybutton are the same: It doesn’t matter at all. God as the creator and breather of life into Adam isn’t bound to either group to give him a belly button or not. What we are required to do is to accept God as Creator regardless of the outside indications and to stand on the word of God in faith. The particular mechanism of creation whether immediate or to some extent through biological scientific indications evolved, the fact remains the same, man is made in the image of God with all the rights and responsibilities associated therewith.

The universe appearing to follow a natural order of development does not itself definitively prove it did actually follow those stages of development, and even to the extent it did, does not disprove God as the creator. The same analysis would apply to our fully grown Adam, in the example above, being evaluated by scientists. Just as soon as God literally finished sweeping the last of the dust off of him, our scientists would assert that Adam was within a certain range in years of age, and might have likely proceeded to state their ability to determine what geographic regions he had lived in during his earlier years, and finally what he had eaten the day before, the bellybutton issue would have just been icing on the cake. In the final analysis God is able to create man with a full stomach just as much as he would an empty one, not to mention the bellybutton.

Faith and our understanding of how we arrived at the position which we have, both as individuals and as a species, is based on our attitude beyond the things which are subject to direct observation. There is a reason for the animosity in many respects between the strongest proponents of science against religion and specifically Christianity. The answer revolves around the fact that Christianity proposes a basis for how the physical universe and man has arrived at the place they have today, but Christianity also says that the actions of man are subject to a higher authority, that man's actions and imaginations are evil. Science and the theory of evolution by removing the necessity of any purposeful Creator, justifies that each man is subject only the dictates of his own conscience and at the most the norms set forth by society of his fellow man. There is no external obligation placed on his heart, mind, and imaginations, much less his actual action, to any eternal God who requires righteousness in all these areas from the person themselves. The Bible states that the same physical universe which man explains away as result of randomness is really God's own testimony of himself because of its unity, organization, and majesty.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness. Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. 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: Because that 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. Professing themselves to be wise they became fools... Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator who is blessed for ever. Amen... And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient... Who knowing the judgment of God that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but have pleasure in them that do them. [Rom. 1: 18-32]

The argument arises again, why would God, create earth, the heavens, and even man himself which fit so neatly within scientific "understanding" of how creation can

occur without a God actively engaged in the process, and yet God himself being the moving and primary factor in all creation as the Bible indicates. The answer again is that God is free to act and to create as it seems good in his own sight. God is not obligated to justify himself to his creation. What the Bible does show us is that he is calling a select group to himself, he did not reveal himself to all people in equal measure throughout time, he did not reveal the fullness of his righteousness through the law except to Israel. The Bible never indicates that he intends all men to accept him, and to acknowledge him as Creator in this life; the judgment will be the place where every person will acknowledge their Lord. It is his grace who he calls to himself. He does not make it impossible to choose another path or belief other than on his Son, Jesus Christ. In fact, God takes satisfaction in taking the wise of this world, and leading them astray, through their own “understanding”. Is this fair? The question really is, according to the revealed word of God, do all things have to be completely equal in how God chooses to reveal himself and to work in the heart and understanding of every man the same? The answer as already shown under the discussion of Grace is no. The testimony of God to man through creation goes forth to all the world calling unto men’s hearts, is equally apparent to all men, how each man reacts to this calling and what he does with it is how each man is judged. Just as the calling of God, through the law, is revealed to the world, but the fact that the world chooses to ignore the law or to corrupt the law does not nullify the righteousness of the law, it only serve to justify that judgment which will come.

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us that are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent... hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. [I Cor. 1: 18-21] see also Isa 29: 14.

That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. [I Cor. 2: 5]

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 written, The just shall live by faith. [Rom. 1: 16-17]

Looking back to the Old Testament and the various prophecies regarding Christ, many scriptures were widely contradictory, some spoke of a savior who was suffering and poor, others spoke of a mighty king ruling with a rod of iron. Some scriptures spoke of the Messiah coming from Bethlehem, still others spoke of him coming out of Egypt. All these various references and allusions made it very easy for those who were predisposed not to believe in God making himself flesh and coming to save his people, to take their position of disbelief. When Christ did arrive he was known to be from Galilee, where he was raised, after being born in Bethlehem and his parents taking him and living in Egypt for a few years after his birth. All these other surrounding facts were not known

to the religious leaders of Israel when they sought to deny Christ as the Lord based on the fact the scriptures never mentioned the Lord coming out of Galilee. God feels no obligation to force people to believe in him. Faith rises out of a heart called unto God. It is this ability to have equally or even greater appealing choices after the flesh which makes the selection of spiritual alternative even more attractive in the sight of God. Abraham journeyed in the wilderness looking for the city coming down from God, and not looking to the city already in plain view such as Lott did with Sodom. That is the faith God requires from his chosen people.

Spiritually faith constitutes a response to the calling of God in our personal life. Faith is the strength and willingness to move forward based on compunction of the soul; being called by the One who formed us; and who gave himself for us. Some men have no faith in things of the spirit; their hope, faith, strength, and confidence is in the things of this world. These men who have no spiritual faith within themselves fall into the classification of vessels of dishonor, discussed before.

When spiritual faith is discussed, this faith must be administered in a spirit of humility, and love to God. Faith based on the power and faithfulness of God does not immediately equate to righteous faith. Faith in Christ carries with it, certain promises toward those who believe in him, as the living and sovereign Lord. Going back to the Old Testament, Balaam had faith in God based on his prior experience and knowledge of God in his own life. Yet he used this power to further his own personal will and objective, not out of love to the righteousness of God. In the New Testament, Jesus warns that many people who cast out devils and do many miracles in his name, through faith, will be rejected because they sought after their own glory and honor in this life, instead of truly loving and submitting their lives to Christ, and to love of their fellow man.

There is therefore no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. [Rom. 8: 1]

Godly faith entails true love; it is submitting our wills, our plans, our desires to those of God and his direction. God requires us to put all of our life into his hands. Without knowing where our path will take us all Christ says is follow me. It is faith that allows us to step away from what we know and to walk into the unknown, except for the fact that our faithful Savior has promised never to leave us or forsake us.

Faith is not only a basis for our understanding of the physical world, and a spiritual acceptance and submission of our heart and will to that of Christ as Lord; but faith is the actual application of this belief into action in our own lives in this world. Faith is stepping out and walking with God, following his call, not mere acknowledgment and profession, but what Christ does is call us unto discipleship to follow him in our attitudes and in our actions. Faith in the sense required by God, is a willingness to bind ourselves to him, just as a couple come together in marriage, the same love commitment is required of those who come unto Christ. A husband and wife forsake their own families; their own people; their prior lives as individual; they are called to become one;

both in body and in mind and heart. The marriage relationship goes beyond close friendship; and mutual appreciation; it is a commitment for better for worse for richer for poorer; in sickness and in health; in summary it is total commitment. Faith brings us to accept Christ, who has called us unto himself. It is the life and walk of faith, putting that faith in action and application as part of our own lives and decisions, and the consequences from those decisions, that becomes the binding process which brings each individual together with Christ; into one body; the marriage relationship; which is outwardly manifested through the church

True faith, justifying faith, comes from a commitment to the one who calls us out of darkness unto his marvelous light. True faith in God is based upon love flowing from a heart committed entirely unto Christ. Not everyone who accepts and experiences Christ will have the dedication and consecration which faith call man to. Merely experiencing Jesus and having a single experience alone does not create the faith which saves to the utmost. Many times people come to God, and experience him to the extent they desire; not the extent which God himself desires them to. They seek him when the winds are blowing and their ship is being rocked by the storm, they have faith in him to calm the waters; yet they do not follow him when he calls to them to step out on the waters and come unto him. They believe on Christ to feed them in the wilderness; yet they do not follow Christ when he calls them to follow him; to lay down their nets and follow him. The Bible says that in the judgment many people will claim to know who Christ is, and even to have had close fellowship with him, yet they will never go so far as to commit their hearts to him in faith as their own Lord and Savior. Judas was in intimate communion with Christ and had seen all his miracles yet he betrayed him. Satan was one of the archangels; he is described as having intimate communion with God, even walking in the fires of the mountain of God in heaven. Yet Satan did not have a heart of faith and love which is required by God.. The Old Testament tells the story of Naomi and her two daughters-in-law Ruth and Orpah. When Naomi proposed to go back to her people in Israel once her husband and both her sons died, her daughters-in-law stated they would return with her. Naomi told them they should both go back to their own families. Upon being told this Orpah kissed Naomi; but Ruth clave unto Naomi. After Orpah had gone back to her people, Naomi again attempted to send Ruth away but Ruth's heart and commitment was not to be denied. Ruth's statement of faith and fidelity was so strong that it is used to describe the faith and love which defines the marriage relationship itself. This is the level of faith which Christ calls each individual unto, and this is the level of love which is required from each person's heart unto God.

And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried; the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me. When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.
[Ruth 1: 16-19]

The Bible defines the degree and kind of faith required of us as part of the Church, and separated unto Christ, as childlike faith. Jesus constantly points towards a child as the kind of faith which we must possess. Our hope in God in the final analysis is not based on intellectual justification, and human knowledge. It is just based on a crying out of our soul, like Ruth, that regardless of anything else around us; or what we are told, that we know who calls unto us, and we will look unto him, believing that he will make a way for us, regardless of the situation which exists around us.

As Christians it is this spirit and attitude of faith which we are each called unto in our individual lives. Faith was what justified man in the sight of God in the Old Testament, and it is that same spirit of faith which justifies us today. Faith in the Old Testament was a relatively rare condition; which God truly found only in a few people, often through his direct interaction in their individual lives; calling them unto himself, and for his purpose. Today because of Christ sacrifice he made a way where his spirit is reaching out to the hearts of man all throughout the world. The word of God preached is given to all men, who have a heart which is willing to receive the word.

So then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. [Rom. 10: 17]

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. [Heb. 4: 2]

Our faith is what God is looking for in our hearts and lives. He wants us to put our hope faith and confidence in him. It is faith that puts us in a position where God can demonstrate his power and grace unto us. Without faith we never place ourselves in a situation where God can show himself mighty in our behalf. Whether showing that power is in the form of deliverance in the physical sense, or whether faith causes us to turn again in repentance to a merciful God even after we have failed and come short of his commandments.

Thou [LORD] wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever, for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength. [Isa. 26: 3-4]

For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts... [Mal. 3: 6-7]

If when evil cometh upon us... we stand... in thy presence... and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help... neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon thee... And [the LORD] said... be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's... Ye shall not need to fight in this battle; set yourselves, and

stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you... fear not, nor be dismayed... for the LORD will be with you.... Believe ye the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets so shall ye prosper... Praise the LORD for his mercy endureth for ever. And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against [their enemies]... and they were smitten. [II Chron. 20: 9-22]

God desires us to put our faith, hope, trust and confidence in him that he is able and willing to meet every need if we will just ask him believing. God does not mind, in fact he wants us to ask for his help and deliverance. The process of presenting our needs unto him, and allowing him to meet our needs, serves the purpose in fact of strengthening our faith unto seeing even greater works unto his glory and praise. What displeases God is when we bring our requests in a spirit of despair or accusation, that he (God) placed us in a situation for purpose of hurting us or of seeking our destruction. Disciples didn't ask Jesus to stop the storm, they brought the request based on the fear they were going to die, like Jesus placed them in a circumstance and then forsook them, see Mat. 8: 25. Similarly Israel constantly accused God of forsaking them in the wilderness to thirst and hunger to kill them, when all they needed to do was ask God to meet their need, in faith. God may not answer as quickly as we desire or even in the way we desire. But this come back to an attitude of patience and faith that God will not forsake us, both characteristics please God.

“For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever.” [See Duet. 32: 40] God knows who he is, he knows his position, his power, he knows his plan and purpose, and that it will be accomplished. He knows the end from the beginning. There is no need for faith by God in himself since he is the great I AM. God can not, and will not, deny himself. Yet God knows us and our limited knowledge of himself; he knows that even now we still only see through a glass darkly. When we stand without the full knowledge and still forsake what we can see, hear, feel and touch today in faith upon the promise alone of our heavenly Father whom we love and whom we know loves us. This is the attitude which truly touches the heart of God and the attitude to which he responds in love.

Faith in Christ and his promises operate in a spirit of love. It is the same assurance that you receive in the context of a family relationship, parent to children, or husband to wife, or perhaps with a close friend. In each of these situations the confidence and assurance is based on love. Faith founded in love is the strongest form of assurance. What gives a child the total faith which they operate in? It is that innocent understanding both that their parent loves them without question and also that in their knowledge there is nothing that their parent can not do. God wants us to apply both these elements in our faith, and both of these criteria Christ more than accomplishes. He loved us so much that while we were yet sinners he died for us, and the scriptures testify he is more than able to accomplish anything we have need of. It was God's love, exhibited first through Christ, which made the way of justification for us through his blood. Because of his sacrifice on Calvary, Christ is now entitled to look at us, and our lives, as

washed in his blood; all we need do is come unto him laying down the burden of our sins before him, and then leaving them behind.

Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him... He also shall be my salvation...
[Job 13: 15-16]

Being justified freely by his [God's] grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past... To declare I say at this time his righteousness that he [God] might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. [Rom 3: 24-26]
see Titus 3: 4-7, Heb. 6: 1-12.

In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight. If ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard... [Col. 1: 22-23]

The woman of Luke 7: 36-50 came forth unto Christ she saw him for who he was the wonderful, holy, kind and merciful LORD she had many problems in her life, many sins, problems of the spirit. Just as the woman with the issue of blood and so many others who might have been lame, or blind believed if they could touch the hem of his garment they could be healed. This woman realized her hope for deliverance from the issues in her heart and life, the sins that so ravished her heart could only be met through Christ, as the strength and peace giver. In her heart she understood Christ was her answer, she approached Jesus asking for nothing but all her actions were out of love (washing his feet with her tears, her hair, her kisses, the ointment). She understood in her heart and that he knew her need of healing and deliverance and that Jesus would not leave her comfortless. Jesus did not disappoint. She came worshiping him, praising him, before he ever said 'thy sins are forgiven thee', her faith was that when presented with her need that Christ would answer.

... her sins which are many are forgiven; for she loved much..And [Jesus] said to the woman. Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace. [Luke 7:47,50]

Perfect love casteth out fear. See I John 4: 18. ...[Jesus to parents of Jairus' daughter] fear not; believe only, and she shall be made whole. [Luke 8:50] Fear and faith can not coexist. We must prepare our hearts to truly exercise faith. As we come nearer to Christ we strengthen ourselves, our relationship with him, let our experience with him and thereby our love, strength, confidence in him grow thus our faith also will likewise grow. Regardless of the circumstance and situation, Christ is there he sees us where we are, what we need, and he will never leave us or forsake us. Prayer, fasting dedicating ourselves to God, seeking after him, allowing our confidence and love of him to grow results in our faith in him not only growing but maturing. Faith in God goes beyond him meeting every situation just in the time and manner which we hope or expect. Faith says

we have confidence our need has been made known to God and he will take care of it according to his will and grace. Faith also says when we bring our request it is with the understanding that not that our will be accomplished but that before all God's will be done, even if that is contrary to our own.

Earlier we named off various type of worldly faith which attempt to take away the faith in God, through Christ Jesus. But there is another type of faith which is just as lacking in the ability to justify us before Christ in judgment. Faith in works based on our own worthiness because of righteous living will be met with even more condemnation in judgment than the other types of faith based in worldliness discussed earlier. The soul of the Christian who falls back into works or "the law" itself as his justification must step over the blood of grace to justify himself before God by his own works. This type of Christian will be in danger of being just as blinded to God's true will and command for soul saving justification, as the soul who corrupts the word of God regarding grace as a basis to justify remaining in his sins, yet claiming salvation through confession alone of Christ as their savior.

... The soul that doeth ought presumptuously ... the same reproach the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off... Because he that despised the word of the LORD; and hath broken his commandment that should shall be utterly cut off [Num. 15: 30] An evil heart of unbelief, a spirit of pride, self-will, these are abomination in the sight of God. Knowing and experiencing the love and grace of God yet turning away out of self-will to works alone is to deny the word of God and his plan of salvation and instead turn the word of God and his sacrifice of grace to non-effect. God will likewise turn his face away from you, and instead give you over to a darkened understanding and finally to eternal judgment.

All these men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me, now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; surely they shall not see the land, which I swear to their fathers... But my servant Caleb because he had another spirit with him and hath followed me fully; him will I bring into the land... and his seed shall possess it... How long shall I bear with their evil congregation... the children of Israel, which they murmur against me.... [Num. 14: 22-27] Unbelief in actions and attitudes, never turning their hearts and attitudes unto God, caused the children of Israel to lack the faith to cross over to the experience God had purposed for them. The same risk of unbelief continues today when our heart and attitude is not turned completely unto God, yet we try to rest our justification upon our own righteousness and our works, not upon Christ's own sacrifice. Basing our justification before God in our own works is to minimize the effect of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were partakers of the Holy Ghost... and powers of the world to come. If they fall away [back into self-justification by works and under the law] to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put him to open shame." [Heb 5: 4-6]

For if by one man's [Adam's] offense death reigned... much more they which receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ... by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.... but where sin [through Adam and the law] abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. [Rom. 5: 17-21]

I do not frustrate the grace of God, for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. [Gal. 2: 21]

Christ was the word made flesh and dwelt among us. Through Christ the Old Testament law was fulfilled, the law was perfected and testified to the world. However the world did not recognize the light when it came because of its spiritual darkness. Only through Christ could the law be fulfilled, and in meeting the requirements of the law, Christ was able to bring man unto sanctification through his sacrifice. With Christ's death the price of the law for sin was paid for those who believe in Christ. At the same time upon Christ's resurrection from the grave, the law was revived in a new and living way. Just as Christ was the living word in this world, in the same manner, when we accept Christ into our own lives, and become new creatures, through his blood applied to our lives, the law lives and operates directly in our hearts and lives. As part of the body of Christ, the church, we serve as the testimony of the righteousness of God, unto a ungodly world. The same spirit which lived in Christ, showing forth righteousness through the law and making the world recognize its own iniquity, now operates through believers, and the church body. The world hates the church for shining the light of God upon their own sin and unrighteousness just as the world hated Christ. The church now stand for the living law, which points the world to conviction in the law of the flesh. At the same time the church calls such as will receive the call unto the new life of the spirit in Christ, not subject to the law of the flesh which works death through sin, but the law of the spirit through grace unto life.

God having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself, by himself... yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight; if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled and be not moved from the hope of this gospel... [Col. 1:20-23] see also Heb 10:19-23

Whom having not seen ye love, in whom ye see him not, yet believing ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory receiving end of your faith, even salvation of your souls. [I Peter 1:8-9] see also Jude 1:4. But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved... [Acts 15:11]

God's grace, and the sacrifice of Christ, is what justifies us before God. It is not our works which we perform, under obedience to the law, which qualifies us to be

received of God unto salvation. Jesus requires us to believe on him as our Lord, Savior, and King. It is not this world, the things of this world, or the works of the flesh which qualify us to receive salvation from God. Rather it is the completed work of Christ alone on the cross. All glory, honor, and praise in heaven and earth is to be focused upon Christ, the Lamb slain for our sins, and on Christ our returning Lord and King of kings. Jesus will not share his glory with any man. Man will not be justified to the extent he bases his entitlement to grace on his own good works. The law served the purpose of showing man the standards which God requires of man to justify himself. The law also stands for the proposition that sinful man is only condemned by the law, and is never justified by it. It is Christ alone who justifies the believer and it our faith in Christ which allows us to be sanctified.

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. [Rom. 3: 20]

Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By the law of works? Nay, but by the law of grace... man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law. [Rom 3: 27-28]

All through scriptures faith is pointed to as the first basis of justification of man before God. Faith in that spirit of love and confidence upon the word, promise, and commandment of God, is what God throughout recorded history respected. Abraham believed God and was counted to him for righteousness; he staggered not at the promises of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith giving glory to God. Abraham was fully persuaded that, what God had promised he was also able to perform. That faith was imputed to him for righteousness. The believer in Christ has the same righteousness imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead. See Rom 4: 3-24, Heb. 6:13, James 2: 21-23. See also Gal. 3: 17-18, faith precedes the righteousness of the flesh (circumcision) law. God's promises to Abraham are based upon the righteousness of faith. Romans 4: 6-7, Paul looks to David to describe 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", see Ps. 32:2.

That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him ye are in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption... he that glorieth let him glory in the Lord. [I Cor. 1: 29-31] ... whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace... for... Christ neither circumcision availeth... nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. [Gal. 5: 4-6]

Faith in God [Basis for Action]

How does faith operate beyond our initial justification before God? Faith is the fuel which we move forward unto deeper level and relationship with our Lord. Faith is how we approach the Lord, not based on how things are, but on the promise of God. Thus faith works in two components, first is God's promises which we stand upon in faith, not knowing how the promise will be fulfilled but belief that the Lord is more than able to fulfill his word. The second is God's honoring our faith when we bring our requests before him, he shows his faithfulness and power in meeting the needs and requests of his children.

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth... for herein is the righteousness of God reveled, from faith to faith ... the just shall live by faith. [Rom. 1: 16-17] see also I Tim. 1: 19-20, II Tim. 1: 12

... that the covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ... but God gave it to Abraham by a promise. [Gal 3: 17-18] see also Gal. 3: 6, Gen. 3: 20. ... they which are of faith the same are the children of Abraham... foreseeing God would justify the heathen through faith... saying in thee shall all nations be blessed. [Gal. 3: 7-8]

... your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. [I Cor. 2: 5]

God gives the promise that he will not leave us or forsake us. This does not mean that only sunny skies and blessings will fill all our days. On the contrary at times there will seem to be nothing but darkness and stormy skies around us. It is exactly during these periods that faith in God and his promises are tested. You either believe and are faithful or you can follow your own will, and what appears best in your own eyes. Making it through the dark times, and through the storm, those are what allow a person to develop maturity in faith. Faith is in many ways is a product of experience. See Luke 12: 28-34, "Seek not what ye shall eat or drink neither be ye of a doubtful mind... your Father knoweth ye have need of these things... rather seek the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you... it is the Father's pleasure to give you the Kingdom.. Treasure in heaven... for where your treasure is there will your heart be also."

... [I] will do better unto you than at your beginning and ye shall know that I am the LORD. [Ezek. 36: 11]

Whomsoever believeth on [Christ] should not perish but have eternal life. [John 3:15]

... This the work of God, that ye believe on him that he [God] hath sent [the people asked for a sign that they might believe] ... I [Jesus] am the

bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. But I say unto you; that ye also have seen me, and believe not. All that the Father hath given me shall come to me; and he that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out... of all that hath given me I should lose nothing... And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day... No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him, and I will raise him up at the last day... He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life... I am the living bread, which come down from heaven... who eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life and will raise him up at the last day... [he that doeth so] dwelleth in me, and I in him. [John 6: 29-56]

God is not a man that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent; hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? ... He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel; the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. [Num. 23: 19-21]

Sometimes it feels that we are alone, that the entire world is against us. It is during this period that God desires us to lay all our hope upon him. The Lord will not put more upon us than what we are able to bear, but we do not know how much we can bear until the weight is applied. God knows the end from the beginning thus we are called upon to wait upon the Lord. Trials and tribulations serve the purpose of shaping our character, the steadfastness of our faith, through discomfort and even heartbreak we are made into more acceptable vessels of honor through patient endurance by faith.

Persecution, tribulation, trials all have a positive effect in that they can work together to strengthen our faith, if we give ourselves and our attitudes over to the Lord. It is through faith we understand and believe. Regardless of what our current situation may be we are troubled yet ‘not distressed’ though perplexed we are ‘not in despair’ and we are ‘not forsaken’ and even when cast down we will ‘not be destroyed’... for this cause we faint not, but through our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. See II Cor. 4: 8-18. See also Tribulations and Trials.

Above all taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked [one]. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God. [Eph. 6: 16-17]

The knowledge of God transcends time, yet we ourselves exist in the present. It is the present that makes and molds our character. The Lord realizes this and works with us in our present, in the course of his plan and purpose, preparing us to be what he wants for us to become. God’s knowing what we are yet to be is based on his foreknowledge of

our molding through experience. In human terms the future of our potential is the end result of our current experience, tomorrow's man or woman is today's molding and forging applied to our life. The knowledge that someone can be the world's fastest runner cannot happen until the individual spends years preparing oneself physically. The same way, a person who will be a world famous doctor or lawyer, will not occur until the years of professional study make the person into what they prior to that time have only the possibility of becoming. See related discussion of Rewards in Heaven. Christ himself was forged into the man he became because of his experience and growth through life. The Bible says Jesus developed in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man, See Luke 2: 52.

Paul states, "I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me [Rom. 1: 12] ... the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth... Herein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith... the just shall live by faith." [Rom. 1: 16-17] Our faith is our strength and also our comfort. Where two or three shall come together and agree in Christ's name God's presence will be there. God strengthens us together by mutual faith concerning God and his delivering, saving, and overcoming power through his body the church. Also God has faith and confidence in us individually. He has known each and every one of us, he has formed us, fashioned us before the creation of the world. He knows us intimately, lovingly, so much he made us to hear his voice when he called us unto his grace. At the same time when he made us he had faith in us that he gave us free will to make our own decision whether to walk after this world (life focused on ourselves) or to take up his cross ourselves and to follow him and his call to our hearts in faith. Just as Abraham when God called him with promise of a new land he went forth even when he had never seen that new land but he believed the Lord whose voice he knew would not forsake him and was able to more than accomplish all he had promised. Likewise we as Christians give up our hope in this world and upon the spirit of Christ calling us out of this present world and giving us the promise of a greater life and existence in a land we have not yet seen yet we follow God in faith that he is more than able to keep us in his love and grace until he brings us unto that eternal promised land.

... by faith we stand. [II Cor. 1: 24]

As a child of God we have power and authority to act upon this new relationship which Christ has drawn us into with himself. We can bring our petitions with faith before the throne of God in prayer. God knows our needs, and requests before we ever speak them, yet God still wants us to ask. Just as a father after the flesh, he loves us, and takes pleasure in meeting our need according to his riches in glory. Faith stands for the understanding that he may not answer our prayer immediately yet he has heard and the answer is on the way. The heart of faith says even though I may not see the answer or understand why things are occurring the way they are, yet my heavenly Father cares for me.

... but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith, ...whatsoever things ye desire when ye

pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. When ye pray forgive that your Father may forgive you... [Mark 11: 22-26] see also I John 5:14-15

... if ye have faith and doubt not... if ye shall say unto this mount be thou removed and cast into the sea; it shall be done. All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing, ye shall receive. [Mat. 21: 21-22]

... whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my [Jesus] name, he will give it you... and ye shall receive that your joy may be full... ye shall ask in my name... For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I come from God. [John 16: 23-27]

Along with the authority and promise of God's hearing our prayer, there is also responsibility and obligation imposed on us. Regarding the area of faith in God's righteousness in answering our prayer is the importance to subject our will and desires to the heavenly will and plan of God. Sometimes what our flesh or spirit is desiring, even if that desire itself does not constitute sin, yet what we may desire does not conform to the ultimate will and plan of God. Sometimes we must know that the purpose of the Father goes beyond our individual life and circumstance and may be affecting another person or even a group, perhaps at the momentary detriment of our own personal condition. Jesus himself was faced with this situation in the garden prior to the time of his crucifixion.. He prayed, 'Abba Father, all things are possible for thee, take away this cup from me, nevertheless, not what I will but what thou wilt.' [Mark 14: 36] At other times what we may desire for ourselves may be something which God knows might be a stumbling block in our lives later. An item not itself sin, can become the basis for sin in our lives subsequently, thus if God refuses to answer our prayer, or more accurately answers it in a way which we don't want him to; God is still righteous and loving in his response. See further discussion relating to Temptations and Money

Seek with humbleness God's will; bring your self-will, desire, pride, under submission to God's will. We are not to tempt the Spirit; God may answer your prayer, honor your faith - but it not be his perfect will. Satan tried to tempt Christ to exercise his promise, out of spirit of self-will and pride but Jesus refused. This is our obligation in exercising our authority in faith. Thus, it is possible that God may answer a prayer which is not part of his perfect will, and there can be others whose lives are adversely affected, or another person's soul lost, by God's honoring our own self-interested prayer. This makes it even more important, whenever we bring our requests before the throne of God; we always ask that our Father's will be done, on earth as it is in heaven, and not necessarily our own.

Whatsoever, ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be magnified in the Son. If ye ask anything in my name I will do it. If ye love me keep my commandments. [John 14: 13-15] see also John 16:23, Deut. 18: 20-22. It is possible to have faith in Christ his promises - his power- to see miracles even, yet not have faith in

him as Savior and Lord (to have faith in his promises, and yet not keep his other commandments).

God's promises are true and he will honor the faith placed in him. However we should not mistake God honoring of faith, even in miracles, as God's approval of our motives, desires and even as affirming the way we live our lives. Just two examples are Balaam, a gentile who the enemies of Israel desired to use to curse Israel (because they knew from prior experience God honored Balaam's curses). Next was Samson he was a nazirite yet he constantly violated his vow and was controlled by his flesh, yet what he had was faith and confidence in God and his power to hear his prayer and meet his need. Both these individuals through their faith in God were known for bringing about great 'works' yet they both are rebuked because their self-centered will and motivation was not acceptable to God. In the final judgment many people will claim to have performed many great works and miracles in the name of Jesus. Yet he will say unto them depart from me ye workers of iniquity. Though they had faith in God and his promises yet they exercised that faith with the heart and attitude of Balaam and Sampson.

Faith is not an unlimited resource in our personal lives, though the power of God we call upon in faith is unlimited. Faith requires us to cultivate and develop it just as any other character trait, or physical characteristic. Faith is like a muscle, if you never use that muscle it will slowly weaken and finally atrophy. Similarly faith is strengthened through exercise and use. Unless you bring your needs and requests unto the Lord, you never give God an opportunity to meet your need and through answering to receive your acknowledgment and praise. The more you recognize God's moving and meeting power in your life then greater of things you can bring before him, believing he can meet your need. When David made his declaration that Goliath was no match for David through the power of God, he made this statement in faith based on experience. God had already delivered the lion and the bear into David's hand and through this faith he went out to meet the giant. Prayer, fasting, the study and meditation upon the word of God, all these are the things which powerful walk in faith is based.

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth... for herein is the righteousness of God reveled, from faith to faith ... the just shall live by faith. [Rom. 1: 16-17] see also I Tim. 1: 19-20, II Tim. 1: 12

... that the covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ... but God gave it to Abraham by a promise. [Gal 3: 17-18] see also Gal. 3: 6, Gen. 3: 20. ... they which are of faith the same are the children of Abraham... foreseeing God would justify the heathen through faith... saying in thee shall all nations be blessed. [Gal. 3: 7-8]

... it is impossible for God to lie... a strong consolation, [we] who have fled for a refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us which hope we have as an anchor for the soul both sure and steadfast... [Heb 6: 18-19] see also Heb. 10: 19-23

Faith Bringing Forth Works [Christ Living in Us]

Up to this point our primary emphasis on faith has related to its justifying power. The power of the grace of God, manifest in Christ, who died for our sins, and upon accepting Christ as Lord we are saved. This saving power and work, has its purpose the glorifying of God through Christ Jesus. The entire predicate of the Old Testament law was justification in righteousness through obedience to the law. All through scripture the fact was reiterated again and again, no flesh, no man, is perfect in his attitude or in his actions. All men have sinned and come short of the glory of God. The purpose of the law, was to show forth the standard of righteousness exhibited by God, and what is required of man in his character and conduct if he is to stand before God in his own righteousness. God knew man could not meet this standard yet through the law he gave man the opportunity to learn this for himself, and not merely rely on God telling him. The law and man's failure under sin served to justify God in his righteousness and provide the basis upon which God will eventually judge a sinful world.

For all these reasons, justification can not, and will not according to the plan of God rest upon outward works as the initial justification of man before God. The initial work which justifies is always based on Christ's sacrifice upon calvary. Many people have taken the fact of this initial justification by grace through faith in Christ as the final step in the analysis. They say that the acceptance of the call of Christ in faith is all that is required, and that alone will allow man to find acceptance before God in judgment. As discussed previously, the false doctrine of self-justifying grace had the effect to make grace a commodity which there was no real price required to accept, rather than just mere formality or superficial acknowledgment. The same principles have been applied to faith. Many teach that upon acceptance of Christ, through professing him as Lord and Savior, that the person is entitled to a life without further worry or concern for his soul, regardless of his past, present or future behavior, because of his confession of Christ. Even an outward profession may be too humiliating today, because of what other enlightened people or the friends of the person may think, many say that just a inward acknowledgment in the heart alone will be all that is required by God to accept the person eternally.

Profession of belief, and faith, are not the same. Faith as set forth in the scriptures is an active living process, and never limited to words alone. Faith does begin, and always begin with the call, but faith always brings about a response in the heart and life of the recipient. Anyone who says they accept Christ, and never has a change in their life and most important in their heart and spirit, never truly go beyond the point of profession alone, and never enter into faith. Those who say profession alone constitutes sufficient faith, may be right in the situation where the failure to confess allows the person off the stake on which they will otherwise be burned.

Righteousness imputed by God based on faith is exhibited by works acceptable to God. Before Christ, works were the basis upon which righteousness was based; now faith, in Christ, brings about the works of righteousness. Christ turned the law inside out.

Where before works though outwardly according to the law served to hide iniquity in the heart, now Christ living in the heart of man calls him naturally to righteous works. Living the law, now has given place to the living law within believers hearts and lives. See Rom. 9: 30-33.

Christ's walk on this earth, and his relationship with his disciples, and then after his death and resurrection, the grace of God, upon the hearts of believers, each revolve around the response to a call. Jesus approached his disciples and said unto them follow me. Each of the disciples through faith left where they were at and followed Christ. They left their occupations, whether as fishermen or a tax collector, and responded to the call of God. Today, as at the first upon the day of Pentecost, hearing the word of God and feeling his call of grace, makes us move forward in faith to begin down the new path which the call of righteousness beckons us.

Paul speaks of our salvation by God's grace through faith, that we are made part of the body of Christ. James Chapters 1 and 2 show the role of works. Each person when they receive the doctrine of Christ as savior in faith asks, "What must I do to be saved". While Christ was still alive Nicodemus asked this, the Jews present in the first days of the New Testament experience asked this, the Gentiles to whom the gospel was delivered, the eunuch, the jailer who was holding Paul, this is the natural result of receiving the gospel of Christ and the convicting power of God's revelation to sinful man. Believing and accepting him as our savior, naturally leads to certain actions. Those first basic actions are: (1) repentance (2) baptism in the name of Jesus (3) receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, as set forth by Peter as the keys to God's Kingdom (see Acts 2:38). Every New Testament Christian went through these basic steps to be saved.

Seek ye the LORD, while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the LORD; and he will have mercy upon him and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. [Isa. 55: 6-7]

If my people which are called by my name, shall humble themselves; and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. [II Chron. 7: 14]

Repent ye therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out... [Acts 3: 19]

And now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. [Acts 22: 16] ... as many of you as have been baptized unto Christ have put on Christ. [Gal. 3: 27]

Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death.... like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life... our

old man is crucified with him that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. [Rom 3: 3-6] Let not therefore sin reign in your mortal bodies, that ye should obey it and the lusts thereof, Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but yield yourselves unto God... know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness... But now bring made free from sin and become servants of God, ye have your fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. [Rom. 6: 12-23]

It must be remembered the Epistles are written to the church itself, to believers who had already accepted the call of Christ in their individual hearts. It was to the members of the various churches to which Paul addressed his letters. Grace and faith brings back the believer to the beginning of his justification before God. Christ being the bridge bringing man back into relationship with God. Each of these churches had first been taught and each member had acted upon their faith through obedience to the keys given by Peter. Repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost place the believer in the right position to begin the expanded walk of faith which Christ calls us into. This becomes the basis upon which we begin to truly build a life of discipleship.

There are various gifts of the Spirit that God gives in various forms and degrees according to his grace towards each person. However there are also certain fruits of the spirit which upon becoming new creatures in Christ we are each and every one expected to bear, perhaps not all the same degree, yet we are all expected to bear fruit. Through salvation we take on Christ and the very spirit and attitudes of Christ will lead us to works and new attitudes which were not part of our old creature. The law is now written in the fleshly tables of our heart, still that law will be reflected in our works. See I John 4:8-17, James 1: 19-22, 26-27, James 2: 8-10, 14-22

Paul in his preaching is by far one of the strongest proponents for the primacy of grace and of faith, in the Christian life. One reason is because of his background and training as a Jew and especially as a Pharisee he knew the allure of justification of oneself through righteous works. He knew how the concentration upon justification based on the law and works, lead naturally away from the heart of meekness, grace, charity, forgiveness, and love, which is the heart of Christ himself. Paul's teachings are also filled with the call to forsake the old works of iniquity; he constantly rebuked backbiting, envy, strife, lasciviousness, fornication, uncleanness. When a professing member of the church would not turn away from his sin, Paul instructed the other members of the church not to fellowship with him, and treat him as a heathen, until he truly repented of his sin.

... the gospel which I preached unto you, and wherein ye stand [see Mark 16:14] By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain... that Christ died for your sins according to the scripture, and that he was buried, and that he rose again

the third day according to scriptures.. And so ye received. [I Cor. 15: 1-11]

Individual choice in regards to faith can not be over emphasized. Faith is first the ability itself to hear the call of grace, but at the same time that call is perceived, faith is also our decision to move forward and follow where it leads, and in the process to leave the life we had before. Faith expressed in works is a love and trust in Christ. It is that love which allows us not to be stopped by the price which will be paid because of accepting him, but looking forward to his reward and calling us unto himself in love.

God will not take away our authority and responsibility relating to our individual choice in relationship to God and his righteousness. We can seek after him, or we can forsake his ways and his paths. God's judgment is based on our decisions which can be said to relate back to our faith, or at least what we place our faith in. Just because we take up the cross of Christ, does not mean that we will continue in the path of righteousness. We have the freedom to turn back at any time; God will not force you to follow him. Faith thus is shown to be a choice, and the power to make that choice remains within the individual believer. God will not leave us or forsake us, but our authority to remain faithful is within ourselves to decide. The world will always be calling unto us; the pleasure of sin will remain before us, whether we take of that fruit as Adam did, or hold on to Christ and his love. See further discussion of Choice.

... many which have sinned already, and have not yet repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed. [II Cor. 12: 21] I write to them who heretofore have sinned... Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves how Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? [II Cor. 13: 2-5]

... Arise therefore and be doing; and the LORD be with thee... Now set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD your God... [I Chron. 22: 16, 19]

Faithfulness to God in works, really relates to the spirit of love. It is not a spirit to justify and glorify ourselves through our works, but rather to please and glorify God. Works thus become the natural result of a life lived in love of Christ. The fruits of the spirit are developed through our personal growth and development in relationship to the Lord. The reason that the things of God are so often described in terms of fruit relates to the fact that without the blessings of God there can not be an increase. God gives us responsibility to tend the field in which the fruit grows; our effort is required to provide soil free from weeds, protected from the little foxes which can spoil the vines, and to plow the fields. See further discussion of Fruits of Spirit.

Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you; For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there

of you whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? ... how much more shall your Father, which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him... Beware false prophets.. Ye shall know them by their fruits... every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit... Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that sayeth unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven... Therefore whomsoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will make him like a wise man, which built his house upon a rock.. And every one that heareth these saying of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man...
[John 7: 7-26]

It is possible to have profession of Christ (as savior) and works but that all these outward professions and manifestations still would not create a right spirit, attitude, intent from which those works operate. If we act out of desire for ourselves to be lifted up and praise by others and for our own glory, we utterly fail to meet God's criteria for our lives, having a spirit of meekness, love and being a servant to all, a desire to do God's will and not our own. See Mat 7: 21-23.

Using Christ and accepting Christ are not the same. Some people never accept Christ as their Savior and Lord by submitting their heart and life to him completely. Rather they take the grace and love of God which he offers to give them just for a degree of peace and inward joy. They take Christ on their terms not Christ's on his. They seek after Christ for their purpose they refuse to seek after Christ's purpose for them. "... for many... are the enemies of the cross of Christ. Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame who mind earthly things." [Philip. 3: 18-19]

For every tree is known by his own fruit... a good man out of the good treasures of his heart bring forth that which is good and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is evil; for out the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. [Luke 6: 44-45] This scripture occurs just after Jesus warns of judging others especially when you are doing the same thing you are condemning others for. To have good fruit or good works requires taking on Christ personally not just intellectually or outwardly. Taking on Christ results in us taking on the spirit character of Christ through his renewing spirit in the Holy Ghost. As we put on Christ we put on his spirit and naturally as a result his works. As Christians we can and will judge. The standard and spirit of that judgment is to be based on humility, meekness, love, forgiveness, kindness, and righteousness. Judgment after the flesh results in pride, self-righteousness, bitterness, unforgiveness, doubt, fear and finally hate not just of the sin but of the sinner. The attitude we have (either for the good or evil) will reveal itself, first in our words and speech, but finally in our acts and behavior (works). The burden thus remains on us to tend the field of our own faith, to ensure the fruits which our lives, minds, and attitude bring forth is the type of fruit which will be found acceptable before God. See further discussion Believer's Thought and Attitude.

... beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. [II Peter 3: 17]

REVELATION OF WHO CHRIST IS. IMAGE OF GOD

The discussion to this point has revolved the nature and character of God and how these various aspects have been progressively revealed to man. The next question becomes is how, in what manner, has God chosen to reveal himself to his creation. The Bible describes God as invisible, a spirit, which fills completely both heaven and earth. In the overview discussion of God earlier we related him to various geometric representations. In the final analysis God was said to be represented by a sphere inside of which all creation exists, yet which itself goes beyond creation itself. God thus permeates all creation, equally, both in terms of space, as well as time itself.

Can any man hide himself in secret places that I can not see him sayeth the LORD? Do not I fill heaven and earth sayeth the LORD. [Jer. 23: 23]

Because of the very nature of God always being present at all times in every place equally it is not a matter of being able intrinsically to point to one place or one time and say that God is more here or there. Like the wind we see its effect but are not able to say here it resides or there it goes. Because of our very limitations in perception, understanding, and thought as finite beings we can not grasp the nature and reality of God. If we attempt to look back, God is already there; if we think into the future, God is already there; even as we sit here now we must understand God is equally present with us.

The Bible does tell us that all creation is made by God and for God. Thus heaven and earth was created for a purpose. The entire progressions of scriptures indicate a process by which God purposed to call a special people unto himself. God is one, there is none beside him, there was none before him, and there will be none after him. We are constantly asking ourselves, why did God do this, why did he not do that, and what will he do sometime in the future? As we have already discussed previously, it really is not our place to ask of God why. That is why God places such a high degree of value on faith. If you love someone it is not necessary to know the 'why' in every situation; once you trust the individual and know that they themselves fully love you, it is much easier to place your faith in that individual. The Bible in fact answers, or at least gives us insights into God's purposes and plans relating to many of these questions, however this revelation relates to his love for us and understanding of our desire to know, yet very often the response remains that God's plan and purposes remain his own to be revealed in the time and for the purpose he himself chooses.

As a general overview, the discussion of the revelation and understanding of God in regards to the form or image he has chosen for himself can be broken down into three primary areas:

God - Invisible - eternal, infinite, and omnipresent

1. Glorified Image - the LORD - the 'Father' (the eternal Christ) unto all creation
2. Fleshly Image - Jesus Christ - The Word made flesh and dwelt among us
3. Holy Spirit - Comforter - Holy Ghost (Christ) dwelling in us.

Did God take on an Image before being made Flesh?

Before we begin the discussion of the manifestation of God to his creation, we must always remember the true essence of God, is his limitlessness. The mere process of taking on a form is immensely important because of our ability to understand and recognize God, much less to actually relate to him on a personal intimate level, required a form or a representation of the eternal in a manner comprehensible by the finite. Despite the fact that God took on an image was not the final stage of his plan related to creation, in fact it was only necessary first step to bring us closer to him, by making himself closer to us. God throughout time and by his Word is constantly revealing himself and his plan of reconciling us unto himself. The process of moving us from the imperfect, the flesh, unto the perfect and eternal, the spirit, involved God first moving from his magnified estate to the flesh to raise us up with him.

... for great is our God above all gods. But who is able to build him an house, seeing the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain him? Who am I then, that I should build him a house, save only to burn sacrifices before him? [II Chron. 2: 5-6]

... The LORD hath said that he would dwell in the thick darkness. But I have built an house of habitation for thee and a place for thy dwelling for ever... Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who hath with his hands fulfilled that which he spake with his mouth... But I have chosen Jerusalem that my name might be there... But will God in very deed dwell with men on earth? Behold, heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built... hear thou from thy dwelling place even from heaven, and when thou hearest forgive [Israel]... Moreover concerning the stranger, which is not of thy people Israel, but is come from a far country for thy great name's sake... if they come and pray in this house; Then hear thou from heaven, even from thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for... [II Chron. 6: 1-33] see also I Kings 8: 27.

Thy throne is established of old, thou art from everlasting. [Ps. 93: 2]

When we discuss God we tend to begin with Gen 1: 1, when God created the heavens and the earth. In fact, God had an image before the earth was ever created, or even the heavens. When you look at the discussion of God's relationship with creation, the very first relationship existed with the angels and God. The Bible states that the angels like man, are created in the image of God. In fact they are themselves also referred to in the Old Testament as being the sons of God. We have already discussed the divinely ordained or established spheres which God relates to man; those are, the individual; marriage/family; and government. The Bible makes it clear that in relation to God's relationship with the angels, this took place within the context of a governmental structure. One of the fundamental characteristics of God is structure, hierarchy, and

order, just as this is present in heaven; it was carried forward and established on the earth. As you look through scriptures which relate to and describe heaven, it is accompanied by words such as “kingdom” and references to the “throne” of God. The angels were created to serve, and worship God, but as with man God engages in a personal relationship with the angels similar to that of man. He communes with the angels and reasons with them in the same way he related with Adam in the Garden of Eden, and communed with Moses on Mount Sinai.

In order to relate and commune with the angels, just as he purposed for his relationship with man, required that the infinite and omnipresent God to take on a form. It is this form and image which pre-existed and brought all creation into existence. God spoke creation into existence; he formed man from the dust of the earth. God thus chose to take on a form, in order to directly interact with his creation. Having an image makes it easier for the finite creation to comprehend and understand what is in actuality the infinite. The fact that God took on a form was not an inherent requirement, but rather a choice he made himself as part of his own divine plan and purpose related to his interaction with his creation. God condescended in grace and love in taking on the form of man to reconcile man unto himself. Similarly, the Lord took on a glorified image in heaven to relate with his other creation, the angels.

The commandments prohibit the worship of God through graven images. Yet the focus is on the prohibition regarding the graven aspect as opposed to image itself. When you make an image, as with any idol, the focus of praise and faith becomes centered on the object itself. God in his word is constantly calling on each individual to love him and worship him on a personal basis, not just on imagery and ritual alone. Without a graven image, we are each compelled to seek after God individually, with our whole heart, mind, and body, to worship him. The distinction must be maintained regarding God’s image he selected for himself and any image made by man for the purpose of representing God.

Taking on a form or an image also served the purpose of making not only relationship and communion between creation and the creator possible, but it also served to make it easier for God’s creation to worship him. God understands and appreciates that our understanding is based on what we can perceive and relate to. Ideas and principles alone can be based on intellectual understanding and appreciation of their importance and benefit. Yet that was not the basis upon which God desired to relate to his creation. True love requires relationship, not just intellectual appreciation, but personal communion. The various forms and images which God has manifest himself all are for the purpose of drawing us closer to him, and establishing the basis upon which God is to receive all of our worship and praise.

All throughout the Bible there is the twofold acknowledgment that there is but one God, who is invisible and who fills all things. Simultaneously in regards to personal descriptions by various writers there is acknowledgment of a physical majesty possessed by God. All throughout scripture the fact is made clear that the eternal God has taken upon himself a image to relate in various degrees and ways with his creation.

In the year that King Uzziah died. I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple... and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips... for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. [Isa. 6: 1-5]

Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he came from [out of] God, and went to God. [John 13:3]

Once we acknowledge the fact creation relates to God, in the form of a divinely ordained and established image, the question becomes is God in fact, a unification of purpose and relationship of more than one image. Or is there only a single unified God, beside whom there is no other, and who chooses to reveal himself and to relate to his creation in various degrees through the image or images he takes for himself?

The answer to this question is stated over and over again in scriptures. There is only one God. This same God created the heavens and the earth. He existed before creation and will remain after all creation has passed away. This one God, never changes, though everything else around may vary and fluctuate, he remains the same, in his nature, his character, and will.

. *There is one body, one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism. One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. [Eph. 4: 4-6]*

Know therefor this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the LORD he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath; there is none else. [Duet. 4: 39]

See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me; I kill and I make alive. I wound and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live forever. [Duet. 32: 39-40]

There is none holy as the LORD; for there is none beside thee; neither is there any rock like our God. [I Sam. 2: 2]

What we are constantly doing, as creation, is to reconcile our understanding of God, to what we have been taught or worse yet what we think God should be according to our own estimation and understanding. Trying to force God in his existence and how he manifests himself to his manifesting to our own judgment, is roughly equivalent to attempting to conform God to our own standards of righteousness, and judge him by our own criteria. As already discussed we can not do that, rather what we are called upon is to accept and praise God as he chooses to reveal himself unto us.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts; neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. [Isa. 55: 8-9]

Declaring the end from the beginning; and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure... I have spoken it, I will bring it to pass, I have purposed it, I will also do it. [Isa. 46: 10-11]

Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD thy creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. [Isa. 40: 28-29]

Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with a span and comprehended the dust of the earth... Lift up your eyes on high and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number; he calleth them all by names... [Isa. 40: 12, 26]

The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. [Prov. 15: 3]

Prophesy of Christ Our Savior (in the Flesh)

All through scripture, from the very beginning, the promise was set forth of a messiah, a savior of the people. Over time however this redeemer, just as the law itself, took an inherently fleshly and natural application and the true spiritual promise of both was diluted. Just as the promise of a redeemer was present throughout scripture so was the warning that the people of Israel would not be willing to receive him. Thus the statement that the Lord when he came would be a rock of offense, and stumbling block, even as he reached out in love and grace unto his people.

A virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (God with us). [Isa. 7: 14] A stone of stumbling and for a rock of offense.. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken..[Isa. 8: 14-15], Mat. 10: 34-38.

The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. [Ps. 118: 22] See Ps 2 the first of the prophetic psalms.

We must constantly keep in mind when discussing of the revelation of God, and God's manifestations, God has a will, plan, and purpose for all things. All the world, all creation, is made by him and for him. Man specifically has a purpose to perform within God's perfect will. The fall of man occurred similarly within the context of God's greater eternal purpose. By the same token, the reconciliation process was foreordained of God, to bind mankind who from a free spirit of love binds himself unto a God, who of his own free choice and will made a way of salvation for all men.

... The LORD hath called me from the womb, from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. And he hath made my mouth, like a sharp sword, the shadow of his hand he hath hid me... The LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him... I will also give thee for a light to the gentiles that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth. [Isa. 49: 1-6]

Christ, in the flesh, is constantly pointing to the Father. Yet the Father and Son are one. The question then persists if Christ is in fact the fleshly physical manifestation of the eternal God, why was he giving praise unto the Father? The answer is that Christ Jesus was God but he was also man and like man in the flesh upon this earth, and this flesh will pass away, this flesh itself was corruptible. The Jews and even we today as Christians when we are at our most righteous still have the propensity to begin to glory in our own flesh (outward righteousness). What we must do, and what Christ always did in his teaching, and in his behavior and attitude was to seek for the higher calling of God. We are called to have a right spirit a right attitude. All that we do in our flesh must be done in service, in love, in submission unto the spirit of God. God through Christ is the perfect expression of his love for each and every one of us. Christ in the flesh always pointed toward the higher the perfect, the spiritual, he never gloried in his flesh; and

through his example he teaches us likewise not to glory in our flesh, even when it is itself righteous works. All glory on earth and even later in heaven all glory and honor, even in righteous works, belongs to God in the higher spiritual sense.

... yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend. O daughters of Jerusalem. [Song Solomon 5: 16] Henceforth I call you not servants... but I have called you friends... Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go forth and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give to you. [John 15: 15-16]

Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands... [Isa. 49:16] (nail prints)

Even when we are with Christ in the New Jerusalem, and are ruling and reigning with him, we are still pointed toward the eternal, the love, holiness, and righteousness of the eternal God. Even the glorified Christ who will rule and reign all things for ever is still a representation, a manifestation, of the eternal and infinite aspect of God. No matter where we are today, where we were yesterday, or where we shall be tomorrow, God is already and has always already been there. Just as the fleshly Christ, gave glory unto the eternal and glorified God, in the Father. So the glorified Christ, as High Priest, will lead us and be our example as we give praise and glory unto God, through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Behold my servant, whom I upheld; mine elect, in whom my soul delights, I put my spirit upon him, he shall bring forth judgment to the gentiles.. For a light of the Gentiles... [Isa. 42: 1-7]

When we discussed Faith previously, we discussed the fact that the scriptures in prophesying Jesus used various descriptions of his manner of appearance, and his purpose in the flesh. He was described as mighty; and yet he was described as tender. He was described as a king ruling with a rod of iron, yet he was also described as meek and lowly. He was described as marred beyond recognition as a man; he is described in glory and splendor. In the end what God requires is the accept him, however he decides to present himself, and never to loose sight of the fact that regardless of the manifestation itself, we are faced with the realization that we are standing before the holy righteous glorious and eternal God.

Behold my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men; [Isa 52: 13-14]

Thy king cometh... he is just having salvation, lowly and riding upon an ass and upon a colt... [Zech. 9: 9] See also Zech 12: 10 (he whom they have pierced); and Zech 13:6 (I was wounded in the house of my friends).

Behold... saith the LORD. That I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth... this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. [Jer. 23: 5-6]

Thus saith the LORD GOD; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar... I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent... of the height of Israel will I plant it and it shall bring forth boughs and bear fruit and be a goodly cedar, and under it shall dwell of the fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD have brought down the high tree, and have exalted the low tree... I the LORD have spoken and have done it. [Ezek. 17: 22-24] For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant... [Isa. 53: 2]

And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them even [the branch of] my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the LORD will be their God... [Ezek. 34: 23-24]

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. [John 12: 32]
The lifting up of Christ on the cross if we will look upon him, accept him as our savior he will take away our sins, and take us out of the death which is the natural result of sin. Moses made a brass snake and lifted it up on a pole when the people of Israel sinned against God, anyone who looked on the serpent would be healed. See Num. 21:8. Christ on the cross took the place of the serpent (symbol of sin) for all mankind.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness even so the Son of man be lifted up (on the cross) whosoever believeth on him, should not perish but have eternal life. [John 3: 14-15] [John 5: 45-47]

For he made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. [II Cor. 5: 21]

Salvation Through Christ ('Door'/'Shepard')

God taking on the form of man had a plan and purpose. Jesus became the door through which all men must enter to find reconciliation with God. Christ along with being the door also became our shepherd, the sustainer of our souls and provider through his love and grace.

Many people still argue as addressed in the discussion of righteousness and grace, that it is unfair that our salvation is dependent upon accepting one man alone, even if that one man is Jesus Christ himself. Yet the scriptures from front to back are always clear, God will not share his glory and his praise with any other. Each person who is accepted of God unto eternal salvation will only do so because they came to God through Christ Jesus, and accepted him as their Lord and Savior. Many people will still say that many other religious, philosophical, and moral leaders throughout history taught much the same principles and lived similarly exemplary lives. For the sake of argument we can even assume that is true. Yet the fact remains we are each and every one God's creation, and God set forth a specific and definite process of salvation, and that process is focused upon Christ Jesus, and his resurrection from the dead.

He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth by some other way, the same is a thief and robber... but he that entereth by the door is the Shepard... the sheep hear his voice and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out... and sheep follow him for they know his voice... a stranger will they not follow, they know not the voice of a stranger... Verily I say unto you I am the door of the sheep. [John 10: 1-7]

I [Jesus] am the door, by me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved... I am the good Shepard.. Giveth his life for the sheep. [John 10: 9-11] see Col. 1: 13-14

And other sheep [gentiles] I have which are not of this fold [Israel]; them also I must bring and they shall hear my voice, and these shall be one fold and one Shepard. [John 10:16]

Strive to enter in at the straight gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. [Luke 13:24] There is only a certain way of entering in and each person comes in by the same door, through Christ's sacrifice and faith in him leading us to repentance for our sins and baptism. If we stand on our own righteousness and our own works or any other way of gaining salvation, we shall not enter in. We must continue in submission unto God even until the end, that is the only way, the straight gate, unto the kingdom of God.

As discussed under the Grace and Faith, not every person is ordained to receive the calling of Christ in their lives, vessels of honor and dishonor. Similarly, not every person has the faith, or desire to submit themselves to the solitary call of Christ alone. Their spirit, their mind, their attitude, even their pride will make it impossible for them to accept Christ as Lord of their life. That is the choice each person has the right to make; the decision to accept him and follow him rests within the discretion of the person themselves.

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father, but by me. [John 14:6]

I give unto (my sheep) eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. [John 10: 28] see also I Peter 2: 25

Christ as the door and the Shepard reserves to himself the position of all our praise and worship, and glory, and reverence throughout this world and the world to come. The angels give praise and worship to Christ because of who he is, because of his position and authority. Man also gives glory and honor to Jesus for the same reason, yet we have been called to God through Christ in love. We are brought into fellowship because of Christ's sacrifice for us individually; Jesus did not give his life and shed his blood and become the mediator for angels; he did that for you and me. For that he is entitled to all of our praise and glory.

For ye were as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the shepherd, and Bishop of your souls. [I Peter 2: 25]

Even the Spirit of Truth (Holy Spirit) whom the world can not receive.. But ye know him for he dwelleth with you and shall be in you. [John 14: 17, 21]

Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature old things are passed away, behold all things are become new. [II Cor. 5: 17]

In summary, in relation to salvation of our souls, it is either God's way through Christ or the highway. We must submit ourselves to God through Christ. We are called to lay down our old ways and to take up a new path. Walking after the flesh, in legalism alone, this is impossible. Yet it is love, love of Christ, and Christ now living in our hearts which gives us the strength and the grace to run the race set before us.

Christ our Perfect Sacrifice

Up until Christ, righteousness was possible only through the law, and observance of the law, and through obedience to the law by our works. As we have already discussed regarding righteousness all these methods by which man sought to justify himself through works were totally inadequate as a basis for justification before the eyes of God. One reason for this was that the law was in fact spiritual in its call, and obligation upon man to have a right spirit and attitude. Yet the old man, the man of sin present in man's heart and in the flesh, were constantly at war with the spirit which did desire after righteousness. Christ thus became the ultimate mechanism which made a way for man to be reconciled personally with his creator.

From the time that sin and its effects first entered into the world in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Even, and then Cain and Able there has always been a need for a sin sacrifice, and the shedding of blood. This requirement was continued all through scriptures continuing on to Noah, to Abraham, and then being set forth in the Old Testament law itself as an essential element of the people of Israel's relationship with a holy God. In the O.T. God established a process of sacrifice after the flesh. There was no 'remission' through the sacrifice of animals there was merely a rolling forward of God's judgment through following his commandment for sacrifice. Hos. 7:2, Isa. 53, Ex. 24: 5-8.

[avoiding the judgment of God during the Passover]... they shall take... a lamb... without blemish... the whole congregation of Israel shall kill it... the blood shall be to you for a token... when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you... [Ex. 12: 3-13]

For the life of the flesh is in the blood... for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul. [Lev. 17: 11] But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof... [Gen. 9: 4] For the life of the flesh is in the blood... upon the alter to make an atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul. [Gen. 17: 11]

Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; I will raise him up at the last day. [John 6: 53-54]

The discussion particularly dealing with blood shows the overlap and interrelation between the basic physical laws of life, the Old Testament law in relation to the Jewish people and their lives, and finally the final application of the necessity of blood in relation to Jesus Christ and his sacrifice. The Old Testament law was very strict and Jewish dietary law today remains very precise as the role and treatment of blood in the life of the observant Jew. Jews are restricted from eating any animal which is strangled

or which contains blood in the meat which is consumed. It is in light of this requirement under the Jewish law and their traditions that Jesus challenges his followers to accept him to the point of taking up his flesh and his blood. Though this statement was made to point the disciples to follow him completely, and the new birth experience in which we become part of the body of Christ, and Christ then lives in us. Yet the way Jesus presented it was in such a way that it challenged those who had been followers of his in their personal understanding of the law, as compared with just an infatuation with Christ that many had to that point. After this challenge the Bible states that many who had followed him up to that point turned away.

The question which Christ was raising in relation to the law, and the blood and flesh, was really a challenge to the people to realize his purpose and relationship to the revelation of God. The people who followed Christ for the most part followed him for the miracles which he performed, opening the blind eyes, healing the lame, casting out devils, raising the dead, but for the most part people followed him for the miracles which he performed in feeding the multitudes. Two separate occasions he took loaves and fishes and fed great multitudes. Many people thus were attracted to Christ because of what they witnessed him do in the flesh. They appreciated him as a miracle worker, a teacher, and even as a prophet. Yet what Christ was exceeded all these labels. Christ was God made flesh, his role and purpose was to reconcile sinful man to God through grace, and his sacrifice of himself. Jesus knew that the hearts of the people of Israel would not accept him, and for the most part, did not see him for who was, namely the eternal Lord in the form of flesh. The average Jew refused to accept the role of Christ as Lord just as much as they refused because of their law's prohibition to eat flesh or to drink blood.

The law, along with sacrifice incorporated therewith, became God's declaration of righteousness to his chosen people. Yet the law was not the last step in God's desired relationship with man. God knew that man in and of himself was not able to meet the requirements set forth in his word. Before the foundation of the world itself, God had predestined to make the word (the law) itself flesh. This was fulfilled in Christ Jesus. All the sacrifices of the Bible pointed toward the need for a pure and sinless sacrifice, the blood of sheep and bullocks only pointed towards the ultimate final and acceptable sacrifice. The word is made flesh and dwelt among us. The same word under the O.T. became death in that it exposed our sin. Through Christ the word is become life, because through Christ's sacrifice the price of sin was paid. Now we are sanctified unto God. See. John 17: 17. The law (word) which David loved, and meditated on, (see Ps. 119) the same word now through the Comforter lives in our individual heart, giving us the power to live victoriously unto God. The law was fulfilled and vindicated in Christ's sacrifice. See Heb. 9 and 10, I Peter 1: 19, I Peter 2: 24.

... Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way; and the

LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth, he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter... for the transgression of my people was he stricken... thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin... shall my righteous servant justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities... because he hath poured out his soul unto death; and he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. [Isa. 53]

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 are 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 our hearts crying, Abba Father. Therefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son then an heir of God through Christ. [Gal. 4: 4-7]

In whom ye also trusted, after ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in who also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy spirit of promise. [Eph. 1: 13]

Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant established upon better promises. [Heb. 8: 9]

Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. [John 1: 29]
see also Heb. 9: 28, I John 2: 2, Rev. 5: 9

Jesus and his being the perfect sacrifice under the law simultaneously brought forth two things. First it brought forth salvation through grace unto all who accept him. Second, those who rejected the law, through Christ, receive judgment. "... truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined, but woe unto that man by whom is betrayed." [Luke 22:22] "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death.." [Acts 2: 23-24] God's perfect plan and purpose of reconciliation for sinful man to a holy God was accomplished in Christ. Jesus' sacrifice and suffering after the flesh was established from the foundation of the earth. The method of bringing about the fulfillment of that sacrifice was also provided by God he establishes both vessels of honor - sealed by him (Jesus) and the vessels of dishonor (Judas, the high priests, even the people themselves) who together sought to put Jesus to death. God's perfect plan purpose is and will be accomplished, he either opens hearts and minds, or blinds hearts and darkens understanding, gives people over to reprobate minds, according as he as the creator of every man establishes. He shows mercy grace as he wills. Just as the brothers of Joseph intended their actions for evil, God also knew set their paths (though evil) in motion, yet he determined to use it as part of his overall plan of development for Israel (in the long run) and save them from famine (in the short term).

Christ became the fulfillment of the law both as the prescription required for sin and as the example of the law in application in both righteousness and grace. The law

through Christ is thus magnified in righteousness and provides for man now hope through the sacrifice of Jesus when before under the law, sin revealed led only to judgment and death. Christ living a sinless life took on death for us, that we now as sinner have hope of life, through him who gave himself for us. Thus God will be magnified throughout eternity for his sacrifice of himself, and giving himself in the flesh that we may live, and moreover to have life more abundantly.

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I might take it again. No man take it from me, I lay it down myself... [John 10: 17-18]

... this is my blood, of the new testament which is shed for many. [Mark 14: 24]

Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation [proprietary sacrifice] through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for remission of sins... to declare his righteousness that he [God] might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Christ. [Rom. 3: 25-26] ... without shedding of blood is no remission [of sin]. [Heb. 9: 22]

Christ as the embodiment of the law provided the means by which all men would be treated equally under the law. Since upon his death, and before his resurrection, he preached the gospel unto the dead, both to the righteous and unrighteous, all men stand equally in the final judgment because the word was brought forth; either in life or in death.

Jesus' sacrifice will stand eternally as a testimony between God and man of God's total and unselfish love toward man. All ages of creation will magnify and glorify God for his love, mercy, and grace. Jesus overcame his own will, his desire that the cup of Calvary could pass from him; yet in the flesh Jesus gave himself unto the task set before. In his faithfulness, we now have a glorified, magnified, and justified mediator who reconciles us in our individual need and shortcoming and sins to God. We now have been given, faith, hope, and confidence that we have an advocate with the Father that we can hold fast to the promises that God has our hearts, minds, and souls in his eternal hands, and he through his faithfulness will keep us regardless of the circumstances and situation which we may face in our individual lives. He will keep us and sustain us through his eternal sovereign grace until he draws us unto himself eternally in love.

[Jesus] was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification. [Rom. 4: 25]

God commendest his love toward us, that while we were yet sinner Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. [Rom. 5: 8-9]

*... through our Lord Jesus Christ by whom we now received the atonement. [Rom. 5: 11] see also Heb. 2: 9-17
I will be merciful to their unrighteousness and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. [Heb. 8:12] see also Heb. 7: 27 ...
your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. [I Tim. 2: 12]*

... that Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. [I Tim. 1: 15]

... except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. [Luke 13: 3-5] For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord (Jesus Christ) shall be saved. [Rom. 10: 13]

In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. [Eph. 3:12]

And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself, by him, I say whether they be things in earth or things in heaven... In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight. [Col. 1: 20-22] also I John 1:7

The final aspect of Christ's sacrifice which we must not forget is the eternal nature and purpose which it is to serve. The blood of Christ is efficacious today but the blood will continue to justify man before God, and it will also justify the continuing glory and praise and faithful following of God by his people in heaven as well as in this earth. Christ will be lifted up forever before all creation in heaven and earth, those things which are seen as well as before those things which are not yet seen, Jesus will be glorified as both King of kings, Lord of lords, but finally as the High Priest in bringing worship and praise to God. In the sense I say God I mean God in his purest most eternal sense; the God who exists at all time in all places equally; the God who formed and fashioned all things according to his will, and through whom all things exist. God, manifest in Christ, made all things by and for himself. Jesus as High Priest will continue to point us toward the higher, truly infinite nature and character of God. Jesus as the mediator thus in the truest sense of the word is the image of the eternal God; and through Christ we understand love and worship the invisible God.

This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner [see Ps. 118:22] Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. [Acts. 4: 11-12]

...[Jesus] for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one, for which cause he is not ashamed, to call them brethren...

he took not on himself the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. [Heb. 2: 10-17]

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works [as justification] to serve the living God. And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. [Heb. 9: 14-15]

... but now once... hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment. So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, and unto them who look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. [Heb. 9: 27-28]

Effect of Resurrected Christ:

Many people today are willing to accept the proposition that Christ did love mankind, and he in fact loved mankind the degree that he gave up his life on the cross for our sins, yet they refuse to accept that Jesus rose on the third day. They come up to the door, they open the door, yet refuse to walk into the promise which God has set before all men. Christ without the fact of the resurrection represents nothing more than the highest degree of human commitment and sacrifice of oneself unto his fellow man. The resurrection points to the divinity and eternal efficaciousness of the sacrifice Christ paid for each of our sins. The resurrection power through faith provides the promise to raise us up unto our Lord again in the last days.

Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, By whom we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand and rejoice in the hope and glory of God. [Rom 5:1-2]

Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption... He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ... Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ. [Acts 2: 27-36; see also Ps. 16: 8-11]

As we have discussed previously, the law as the revealed righteousness of God became our standard for judgment. The law, outside of Christ, though it points us to righteousness can not save us. The law in fact works death in us because it gives light to the sin in our heart and finally in our actions. Man will stand before God having his heart and actions judged against the standard of the law. The law works death because no man can be justified before God through his own action; all men are born unto sin, and live in sin. Only Christ himself was born without sin, and lived his life without sin. Through his sinless character, and suffering death, and finally the resurrection, all men now have hope toward God through the law.

The resurrection represents life. Just as Christ was glorified and magnified after his death for our sins. We also upon accepting Christ are resurrected in our hearts and minds out of the oldness of our flesh, sins, and works. Just as Christ was made new in his flesh, the same hope is ours yet, today we have the promise of being made a new creature through, repentance, baptism, and receiving the holy spirit. We thus die out to our sins, and at the same time are made new in the eyes of God. It is the resurrection which takes the law, which had before been unto our condemnation unto death, and now it becomes written in our hearts, it flows through our souls in the ever renewing power of the Holy Ghost. Where before we saw the world through the eyes of lust and of the flesh, today we now look through the eyes of faith unto Jesus Christ our Lord. Christ through his sacrifice is become our advocate or intercessor even when we deserve judgment (unto the

unsaved and backslider) yet Christ through his sacrifice provides opportunity to repent and become fruitful. See Luke 13: 5-9

Wherefore my brethren ye also are become dead to the law, by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, even to him that is raised from the dead, that ye should bring forth fruit unto God. [Rom 7: 4]

... [God] raised [Jesus] up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption... wherefore he saith in another Psalm, thou shalt not suffer thin Holy One to see corruption [see Ps. 16: 10] ... [Jesus] whom God raised again saw no corruption... through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; And by him all that believe are justified, from all things from which ye would not be justified by the law of Moses [Acts 13: 34-39]

It is not our strength goodness, righteousness but the spirit of Christ dwelling in us that justifies us before God. It is that same spirit of Christ that will work through us to develop spiritual fruit. What we do is submit ourselves to Christ allow him to make us into what he has purposed for our life.

It is through the process of Christ's birth, the word made flesh and dwelt among us, and finally Christ's death, burial, and finally resurrection that we now brought into the family of God. The living power of Christ having power over death of the flesh through the power of God is now the renewing power of Christ living in us. The power of Christ's resurrection in the flesh now has become our power for justification in the spirit. Until such time as we ourselves are raised up unto Christ. What was shown as impossible in the flesh, we are given the relationship with God through Christ which has the power to justify us before our heavenly Father even when we fail and sin. Wrath and judgment required under the terms of the law are superseded because of the sacrifice made for us; and our acceptance of that sacrifice, by Christ Jesus. Now because of Christ we are no longer in the eyes of God the children of wrath (Satan) but now we are sons of God.

As many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry 'Abba Father'. The spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God... joint heirs with Christ... [Rom. 8: 14-17] see also Col. 2: 12-13

... whom [God] raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come. [I Thes. 1:10]

The resurrection of Christ, points to the living relationship and power of Christ working for us even today. The power of Christ is not a dead power limited to his example in his life and death unto those of us who follow after him, in our own lives.

The resurrection gives us hope that Christ even lives today and his power and spirit lives within our own lives and heart even today. The living Christ gives us hope in two different respects one is that Christ is the power of God working and living in our hearts and lives. The second aspect is the position and power of the resurrected Christ as our advocate and mediator before God, standing in our stead, washing us of our sins. Christ standing on the right hand of the Father, the sins and offenses which we committed against the righteousness of God are now paid for under the law by the sacrifice of Jesus in the flesh. Christ as our mediator through the resurrection now stands as our advocate with the Father, now when God deals with us, we are looked upon through the sinless blood of Christ. We are lifted up with Christ, and stand now as joint heirs with Christ through grace.

It is through Christ and his sacrifice and his resurrection that a way of fellowship is provided for all of us. As described earlier God relates to man individually, as part of a family, and through government. It is the resurrection which the family communion is afforded to those who are called out of the world and accept Christ as their redeemer. The family relationship exhibits the character of unmerited and unconditional love. Thus though we may sin, and our behavior might itself necessitate chastisement or even judgment, yet because of our relationship through Christ, we have the assurance that upon returning to the Father, that his arms will be open still unto us in grace. As gentiles we were all alienated and strangers to the law and to God's righteousness, yet through Christ we are adopted and make partakers in the grace of God toward his children. Our communion with God now goes beyond being our King and Lord; and the lawgiver; now we have the assurance we can approach his throne of God with assurance and faith even as unto our Father in the literal as well as figurative sense.

Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. [Rom. 8: 33-34] see also Heb 9: 24

... we have a great high priest, that is passed into heaven Jesus the son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in the time of need. [Heb. 4: 14-16]

Now that he ascended... he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same that ascended far above all heavens that he might fill all things. [Eph. 4: 9-10] see I Peter 3: 19 (preached unto the spirits in prison)

Christ Coming in Glory

The revelation of Jesus Christ will find its ultimate fulfillment and revelation in Christ coming again in glory. Through his coming again the promises in the flesh and in the spirit will be achieved. Christ's coming again will be to call his bride unto himself out of tribulation, the people he who through his grace were called out of darkness unto his marvelous light. Christ coming again in glory will be unto righteousness, to bring the earthly powers under subjection unto his throne. Finally, Christ coming in glory will be unto judgment in righteousness, his rod of iron will upon all iniquity, and before his throne will final judgment be made upon all men.

Jesus promise of his second coming is the hope of his bride the church that he will come again and call us unto himself. It will be in the midst of tribulation and persecution that Christ in his love will come again and bring us out of this world. The Bible promises that he will not put more upon us than what we are able to bear. What can we bear? Only God knows that, but what we also have in determining what we are able to bear, is that he will not leave us or forsake us. The Bible also says that in the midst of our tribulation that the power and grace of God will "seal" us unto Christ. To be sealed is to be separated, to be set apart. The wheat will be separated from the tares, the wise from the foolish, the church from the world, and it is through this process of sifting and purifying that Christ will draw unto himself a people without spot or wrinkle, washed in his own shed blood.

... Son of man cometh at an hour you think not. [Luke 12: 40]

For as lightening ... so shall the Son of man be in his day. [Luke 17: 24]

Signs in the sun and moon and stars.. The sea waves roaring... Men's heart failing them for fear, for things coming on earth, for powers of heave shall be shaken... then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. [Luke 21: 25-28] see Rev. Rev. 19: 11-16; also I Thes. 3: 13. Christ (Second) coming as the King of kings with judgment upon the nations of the earth.

The second element of Christ's return will revolve around righteousness and judgment. Christ is described as the stone which will smite the feet of the Image described in Daniel. In light of this description Christ is indicated as coming in glory and power and in judgment. The final gentile world system will be demolished at the second return of Christ in power. The judgment of the nations will take place upon this return. It is then that the nation of Israel will again be set forth as the example of righteousness of God before the world following the tribulation. The Jewish people and nation will be lifted up and his people will serve as priests unto the whole world.

Just because Christ returns in righteousness and judgment does not completely negate the aspect of grace. As we have already discussed each of these three elements

are essential to the revealed character of God. Yet there are still times and seasons where certain aspects of God's character take prominence especially in God's relation with his creation. Prior to Christ coming to save man, the primary relationship of man to God centered on righteousness and judgment. Even during this period grace was still present yet its emphasis was much less evident. Where through Christ grace was given to all who would receive, before Christ grace was focused on very specific individuals, such as Noah, and families, such as Israel. Upon dying on the cross and rising again, a opportunity was made for all men to come unto God through Jesus Christ and through grace. Even during this current age with the emphasis upon grace, the necessity of righteousness itself (and judgment) did not disappear. What Christ did is to take the law and make it possible through Christ to make the law part of our individual heart, instead of having the law imposed upon a sinful heart through the flesh. Christ as our sacrifice and mediator also serves to support us when we do sin, and to draw us back again through his grace unto repentance once again. Upon the return of Christ, the focus will be upon the flesh once more and the exaltation of Christ and his people in this present world. Where sin through the devil had defiled, Christ and his people, will bring about peace and righteousness in this present world, accomplishing God's initial ideal for man, and his relationship with his God. Grace will still be present but the emphasis and focus of that grace will be from God toward his people. It will thus become through the people of God, Israel and the church, to show forth God's righteousness and grace to the rest of the earth. All the earth will be blessed through Christ's people, until the final judgment, and the eventual new heaven and new earth.

... the King... Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips; therefore, God has blessed thee forever. Gird thy sword... with thy glory and thy majesty... because of truth and meekness and righteousness...[queen] forget also thine own people, and thy father's house... worship thou him ... with gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought; they shall enter into the king's palace... thy children whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth. I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations; therefore shall the people praise thee for ever and ever. Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever... Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness, therefore God thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. [Ps. 45] See also Heb. 1: 9 speaking of Christ as the King of all things in heaven and earth, and as the creator of all things, who formed us before the world began, and who speaks of those things which are not yet as though they have already been.

Be patient therefore brethren unto the coming of the Lord. Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. [James 5: 7]

Christ's second coming in fact will set the stage for even a fuller more complete relationship between Christ and his bride than what we can begin to comprehend today. The millennium on earth following the tribulation will serve merely as a precursor for the relationship and experiences which will follow. This heaven and this earth, and this

salvation experience are really only preparing the way into a greater relationship and understanding of our Lord. The second coming will begin the direct communion and relationship of Christ and the church with his new creation. New heaven and new earth will become the canvas on which God, through his son, Christ Jesus will show forth his righteousness, judgment, and grace anew. Christ will then be glorified by and through his chosen people in this earth, and exalted to reign as kings and priests in the next. See greater discussion of New heaven/ New earth. See also, I Peter 1: 20. Christ as God's Elect from before creation until Heaven and Earth pass away.

... in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him on his right hand in heavenly places. Far above all principalities and power... not only in this world but also in that which is to come.. Head over all things in the church... the body... of him that filleth all in all.. [Eph. 1: 20-23]

And he is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the first born from the dead, that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell. [Col. 1: 18-19]

I was in the spirit and behold, a throne was set in heaven and one set on the throne. [Rev. 4:2]

Holy Ghost (Christ our Comforter - Living in Us)

The Holy Ghost represents the grace, overcoming, sanctifying, and resurrecting power of Christ living within the heart of the individual believer. The Holy Ghost represents the gift of God to those who are saved through faith in Jesus. As discussed under Faith previously, our faith naturally brings forth action on our part. The plan of salvation is broken down by Peter on the Day of Pentecost as follows: repentance; baptism and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. See Acts 2: 38. Both repentance and baptism are actions which the believer in Christ are required to undertake themselves toward God to be reconciled to him. Repentance and Baptism each closely parallel the role of Christ in love towards us in his sacrifice for our sins on Calvary, and in his burial in the tomb. The Holy Ghost represents the resurrecting power of God, which in the natural stands for how Christ is now glorified; likewise we are made new creatures in our hearts and minds, and in the eyes of God. When Jesus in speaking to Nicodemus regarding salvation explained the process as being born again, he was prophesying of the holy ghost experience which was yet to come after his death.

Just as grace is a gift, unto all whose hearts will receive it; the holy ghost is the same to those who accept Christ into their hearts. Repentance, and baptism, are acts undertaken and originate on the part of the individual submitting themselves and their will and pride to the revealed plan of God. The Holy Ghost is an experience which originates from God through the resurrected Christ. It is expressed as a promise, "... and ye shall receive the gift of the holy ghost." A gift is not a reward or compensation for what we have done. Just as salvation is not earned by our righteous works after the flesh, by the same manner, the in filling of the holy ghost is given to each of us because of God's love to each of us individually, who have through love and faith bound ourselves unto Christ.

Receiving the holy ghost is described as baptism. As just mentioned one of the steps which man makes in salvation toward God is the outward submission unto God's commandment to be baptized. One of the first baptisms was not of a Israelite but rather was a gentile, Naaman, he had leprosy and went to a prophet to be healed. The prophet said to go down to the Jordan River and to dip himself in the water seven times and he would be healed. At that time the Jordan was a very dirty, filthy river. Naaman was a general in the Syrian army and at first he refused to go down into the water and dip himself in them. Finally his servants convinced him to do it. After dipping under the waters the seventh time he came up and his leprosy was gone. But in order to be healed he had been required to submit his will and pride and to follow the physical action of baptism as required by God. John the Baptist preceding Christ instituted the doctrine of baptism by physical emersion publicly in water, as part of repentance inwardly of sins. Yet John himself stated that his baptism was merely a type of the baptism which Christ himself would bring, which would not be focused on the outward, but rather a baptism of the heart, an inward baptism.

And the Spirit of the LORD will come upon thee... and shall be turned into another man. [1 Sam. 10: 6]

I [John] indeed baptized you with water, but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. [Mark. 1: 8]

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe... they shall speak with new tongues... [Mark 16: 16-17]

... Except a man be born of water [baptism] and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. [John 3: 5]

What many people think is that the Holy Ghost is an end unto itself. Much like grace; and faith; they view the experience of speaking with tongues itself an outward manifestation of God's continuing justification of their personal walk and relationship; and as evidence of their entitlement to eternal salvation. As long as they can prove to themselves that they "have" the holy ghost because of the feeling in their hearts or by the outward manifestation of speaking with tongues, they believe this will automatically justify them before God in the judgment. The problem is that this statement in and of itself is not wrong per se. In the life of a believer the power of the holy ghost is an essential component, it gives us strength to live victoriously and to overcome the temptations and trials which we all eventually encounter in our lives. As our relationship with God becomes more distant, and colder, one of the first areas which this can be felt is in our experience and communion with God through the holy ghost in our hearts as evidenced by speaking in tongues. At the same time however; the emotional experience; and the outward speaking with tongues; is not itself the final proof and justification in the sight of God that we are "saved" when we eventually stand before our Lord.

Many people will begin their walk with God, and receive the gift of the holy ghost; yet through their own life can turn away from the truth of the doctrine of Christ, and even have what we commonly understand as "sin" in their lives, and yet still have the emotional experience and the outward manifestation of the holy ghost in their lives. As we have discussed in other contexts, such as faith, God's acknowledging of our faith as we take hold on his individual promises, including faith and the holy ghost, does not itself mean that he approves of our lives and the fruits which our lives bear. It is very possible to stand upon God's promises in his word, and yet in our heart and in the way we live our lives to be farther away from God in the end than where we might have first began, and yet still in many ways still have and retain the benefits of various promises given by God to those who believe in him. Just as righteousness, judgment, grace, and faith are exhibited as attributes of God are good and perfect; to the extent these same attributes are possessed and exercised by man the opportunity for corruption will exist. Since the Holy Ghost is a gift it is by definition within the power and responsibility of the person who receives it what they choose to do with it and use it. Many people do take the Holy Ghost and use it for their own personal benefit and purpose and never truly submit themselves so that the gift can and will have the effect to achieve God's true purpose and

use for that gift in that persons' life. After receiving the gift of the holy ghost we must constantly tend the garden of our heart, in our desires, or motives, and our imaginations, to make sure the actual fruit which we bear is good and acceptable before our Lord. See further discussion later regarding Spiritual Fruit.

What is the Holy Ghost, in its proper and intended use and purpose? That is what will be discussed next. Jesus Christ, lived, died, and rose again, that we could have his spirit live within our own heart and lives. Except Christ had risen again and been received back up into heaven according to his own words the Comforter (Holy Ghost) would not be given unto us. By thus leaving us, in the earthly, he has given to us the promise and experience of Christ living and empowering us in our hearts.

... if thou knowest the gift of God and who it is that saith to thee; Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him and he would give thee living water... whosoever drinketh of the water I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life. [John 4: 10-14]

... if any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. [John 7: 37-39]

And I will pray the Father and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever. Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world can not receive... I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you... At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me and I in you. [John 14: 16-20]

The first purpose given specifically for the Holy Ghost in our individual lives is to guide us and instruct individually in our walk with the Lord. The work of the holy spirit is to lead us and guide us to greater individual insight and through the church corporately understanding of the will of God. We as humans created in the image of God, have an abiding desire to know and to understand. However not everything is ours to know, at least today, again and again we are called to fall back unto faith; to wait, to have patience in the love of our Heavenly Father. Thus time and again the Holy Ghost is described as the Comforter. Christ's spirit will teach us, and show us the will of God according to the good pleasure of the Father to reveal it unto us. The Comforter helps us and keeps us when there is no immediate revelation but the spirit living within us, sustains us during those times, and helps work in our lives patience through times of tribulation.

Truth is historically the objective of mankind's understanding. The search, the quest, for truth is often said to be what gives human life its purpose. Truth in its highest expression and fulfillment is made manifest in Jesus Christ. In the beginning of John, it says the light shined in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not. In the

discussion of the vessels of dishonor, under grace, Christ said time and again that the Pharisees could not hear him, could not understand his words. The truth had its full expression in Christ Jesus, our willingness to open our hearts and accept the truth, and once recognizing the truth in Christ, then to seek after greater understanding that is the purpose which the Holy Ghost assists us.

But the Comforter which is the Holy Ghost whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. [John 14: 26]

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father even the Spirit of Truth; which proceed from the Father, he shall testify of me; and ye shall also bear witness because ye have been with me from the beginning. [John 15: 26-27]

... if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you... when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth... he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me... [John 16: 7-14]

The next purpose of the Holy Ghost is to give his people who believe in Christ a common relationship, a common experience, which regardless of our national origin, our social situation, our ethnic origin, the experience of the holy ghost coming in and residing in our heart binds us together. Through salvation in Jesus Christ, and experiencing the power of the Holy Ghost, we are made new creatures; and upon that rebirth we are become members of a new family. The Holy Ghost becomes the common blood which now flows through all the members of the body of Christ in this world; feeding our hearts, and binding us together in love unto Christ and unto one another.

Through the Old Testament, there are references to the Holy Spirit moving upon different men of God, in different situations, to provide strength in given situations, and as evidence of God's divine involvement in their lives. Yet nowhere was there any movement where that special anointing, and spirit of God, was poured out upon a large group at one time. Even with the nation of Israel there was no pouring out of the anointing individually upon all the people at any one time. Christ's resurrection and ascension resulted in the blessing which had existed before in only limited fashion to specific men of God in specific circumstance was now poured out freely unto all who will receive through the power of Christ. The Holy Ghost now becomes the evidence of God's direction relationship with us through grace and faith, not through the law and covenants after the flesh, but because of the living love of Christ in our lives and in his relationship through the church.

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. [Acts 2:4]

... it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God. I will pour out of my spirit upon all flesh... and on my servants and on my handmaidens, I will pour out in those days my Spirit and they shall prophesy... whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. [Acts 2: 17-21; see also Joel 2: 28-32]

Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior and to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness for sins. And we are also the witness of these things; an so also is the Holy Ghost whom God has given to them that obey him. [Acts 5: 31-32]

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said.... so they were sent forth by the Holy Ghost. [Acts 13: 2-4]
... no man can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Ghost. [I Cor. 12: 3]

The spirit of God living and working within us is one of the essential purposes of the Holy Ghost. We are sealed unto God. This seal is, like the law, now written in the heart of the believer. God knows his sheep as the good shepherd. Just as circumcision was a sign in the flesh of God's people in the Old Testament, and the blood upon the doorpost during the Exodus was an outward sign unto God separating his people from the world around them. Through Christ we are transformed into children of God by faith. We are known of our heavenly Father, and can come before his throne of grace by prayer with confidence. The Holy Ghost now stands as the outward expression of our new relationship with God through Christ. The relationship of the believer has moved from servants under the law, unto friends, and finally adopted and made sons and heirs of God, as kings and priests with Christ, as King of kings, and our High Priest. See further discussion New heaven/ New earth.

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. [Gal. 4: 6-7]

... after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise. Which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession [ourselves] unto the praise of his glory. [Eph. 1: 13-14]

But thou Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth... Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away. [Isa. 41: 8-9] Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends... Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you... [John 15: 15-16]

What the Holy Ghost does is to reconcile us together. Christ's spirit serves as the blood of the church, the body of Christ in this world. It is this spirit that not only seals

us unto God, by which our Lord knows us, it is also the power which binds the various members of his body together in this world. The Holy Ghost brings together the Jew and the gentile who previously had been separated by tradition and circumcision. The holy spirit living and residing within us also gives us love, tolerance, and when necessary even forgiveness one for another even when there are offenses committed or just disagreement regarding issues which are subject to the dictates of our individual consciences moved on by the holy spirit, and as the blood bought son's of God.

... he might reconcile both [Jew and Gentile] unto God in one body by the cross... came and preached peace [to both]... for through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. [Eph. 2: 16-18]

But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared. Not by works of righteousness which we have done but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. Which is shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior. That being justified by his grace we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. [Titus 3: 4-7]

Up to his point we have focused on the revelation of the nature and character of God, his taking on an image and finally a bodily form in Jesus Christ as our sacrifice and our redeemer, and finally the Holy Ghost which now fills us and provides a means of sealing our hearts to God and unto each other. The discussion that follows still relates to and builds upon all the issues previously discussed. The Holy Ghost transforming us, living and renewing our heart and keeping us in God's grace is what takes us as individual saved believers and binds us together. The result of the holy spirit within our individual lives and in the life of the church as it lives within the world of which we are still set forth as a peculiar people. The spirit of Christ which acted as a witness of the law unto righteousness, which both called sinners unto salvation, and condemned the people of Israel under the law continues to work today. The love of God still works calling the sinner unto salvation through the testimony of the church and the preaching of the word. That same spirit will give the church and its believers the role of testifying to the sinful world of the righteousness of the law. The world eventually will reject the church, through its persecution of the church, just as Christ himself was persecuted. Christ's rejection brought salvation to the gentiles, and the rejection of the church will finally result in the renewing again of God's covenant under the law unto Israel upon the return of Christ in glory. What we will discuss next is the vibrancy of the continuing grace and the responsibility of continuing in righteousness all under the blood of Christ which now falls upon the church, until Christ calls his bride unto himself.

THE CHURCH (CHRIST LIVING WITHIN THE WORLD THROUGH US)

Members of the Body of Christ

Just as Christ was the fleshly embodiment of the glorified image of the Father unto mankind, primarily to the Jews, today the church itself serves as the image of the ascended Christ unto the world around it. The church today shines in the darkness just as Christ himself did. We are called to reach out in grace and love to the world around us, yet always to maintain our separate calling and character regardless of what the world around us does, or attempts to force us to conform to its own standards.

The church is bound to Christ, through his death, burial, and resurrection. We are bound together in brotherly love by Christ's spirit living and operating within his church. One of the aspects of the holy spirit binding together the church is that the grace of God given to the church and its individual members serves the same purpose unto life as the law served in the Old Testament except unto death. The law will be applied to all men equally in judgment as discussed previously. Under the law each man will stand and be treated equally and evaluated equally by God, regardless of whether the individual is great or small, rich or poor, gentile or Jew. The condemnation, of sin may be greater depending on the particular person's understanding of righteousness; yet the judgment will be equal to each man. In a similar fashion the grace and binding power of God, shed forth for his church through the holy spirit will bind us together unto salvation to God. The extent of rewards which one person may receive based on the grace and will of God may differ one from another, see Rewards in Heaven. Yet each person redeemed by the blood of the Lamb is assured of salvation, and basic rewards in heaven the same as each other member of the church body. In God's eyes we are each and every one precious. God looks at us as part of his body on earth in Christ Jesus his son, and we are made sons ourselves and joint-heirs with Christ. The Holy Ghost binds us together in love, one to another, even if we may not look the same, speak the same language, or have vastly different social or ethnic background. The toe may appear completely separate from the eye, or from the ear, or from the lung. Yet what binds each together is that each is a member of the same body; all working together for the benefit of each other. Likewise in the day that the church is glorified with Christ all of its members will similarly be glorified together in love.

We have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office. So we have many members in one body and everyone members of another. [Rom 12: 4-5]

The rich and the poor meet together, the LORD is the maker of them all. [Ps. 22: 2]

There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. [Rom. 10: 12] ... that many shall come from the east and the west and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. [Mat. 8: 11]

And he that died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto him that died for them and rose again. [II Cor. 5: 15] also Eph. 2: 13

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promises. [Gal. 3: 28-29] also Col. 3: 11, Eph. 3: 5-6

Under the Old Testament law, there was a deep divide between the people of God, and the rest of the world, the gentiles. Christ came and died to draw all men unto himself, out from under the law of the flesh, unto a more perfect law. He reconciled the world unto himself through his sacrifice. In so reconciling, he brought together all men, regardless of whether after the flesh they were Jews or Gentiles. Today everyone stands before one cross, and we have all taken on one name; that of Christians.

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us. [Eph. 2: 14] (Wall separating the Jew from Gentile in the O.T. Temple)

...[the LORD shall] call his servants by another name. [Isa. 65: 15] ... the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. [Acts 11: 26]

The church is challenged and expected to deal internally with an issues and disagreements, and disputes which may arise. Members of the body of Christ are instructed to seek justice among themselves, but in so seeking justice it is to be under a spirit of meekness, humbleness and love, even preferring our brother's above ourselves. The spirit of Christ is exhibited in a healthy and living church. It is when sin, self-centeredness, and apostasy begin to weaken the church, when the results are exhibited in how the members of the church begin to deal with, or rather against, one another.

Dare any of you having a matter against another to go to law before the unjust and not before the saints... is there not a wise man among you... [I Cor. 6: 1-7]

... if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens and fulfill the law of Christ. [Gal. 6: 1-2]
See further discussion Believer's Attitudes.

The church and particularly its individual members are moving towards greater level of glory than what we know or are experiencing on this earth. Just as Christ upon his rising again was glorified with the Father, similarly the members of church receive the promise that Christ's ultimate goal and purpose is to call us unto himself, and that we will be glorified with him. We will be glorified both in our bodies and in our position and authority. The purpose of the church is to give praise unto God, through Jesus Christ, in this world. We are called to stand as a testimony to the world. In the new heaven we will continue to give all glory, honor and praise unto our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. All creation will give God praise through Christ for his righteousness, judgment, and grace because we will continue to stand as his chosen bride, throughout all eternity.

... ye are no more strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints, and the household of God. And are built upon the foundation... Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. In whom all the building fitly framed together unto an holy temple in the Lord. In whom we are buried together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. [Eph. 2: 19-22]

Now unto him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us. Unto him be glory in the church by Jesus Christ, throughout all ages world without end. [Eph. 3: 20-21]

When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. [Col. 3: 4] see also I Thes. 4: 14-18

The final general question which often arises regarding the church and the believers who constitute the church is whether it is a visible or invisible presence or force in the world? The answer without doubt has to be the church is intended to be a vibrant and living force in the world and on society. That does not mean that the role of the church is to seek political authority for itself in this world. At the same time it does not mean that the church is to be so spiritual in nature that it is no earthly good. The church stands and takes the role of Christ living in this present world and it serves the same role and purpose which Christ himself stood for. That is to be a testimony against unrighteousness and the sin of the world; yet at the same time the church must reach out in love, humility, and tenderness to the sinners in the world and pointing them towards the light. Christ came in humility and love to call sinners unto salvation; and the church stands in this same capacity and role. The argument made by many in the world is that the church should be concerned with the spiritual only, yet not have any affect on current society and political system which society functions. Christ himself when he saw the sin and corruption of the temple, which was the center of spiritual and social life in Jerusalem, he overthrew the tables and cast out the merchants. No matter what the church and saints do, so long as they stand for the traditional word of God as set forth in the Bible, the world will never accept them; in fact we will be hated, and even persecuted for our beliefs. Jesus himself states that the servant (the church) is not better than the

master, and if the world hated him it will likewise hate the church, because both stand for the righteousness of the law, which through the light of the church the world is forced to see in itself. No matter how much the church or the members of the church may wish our life and our ministry were invisible as long as we maintain and acknowledge the truth, the light which shines forth may not be accepted but it likewise can never be ignored.

Gifts and Operations of Body of Christ

Once we acknowledge that Christ has made for him a people set apart unto himself, called out of this world, we ask what is it that makes the church and its members unique and distinguishable. This uniqueness of the operation is broken down in the Bible into two different areas, the church as an organization or governmental structure, and next as to the individual saved believer and the fruits which we bear through Christ in our individual life. These individual fruits in turn are intended to influence righteous operation of the offices and functions of the church corporately.

The church itself, and the individual believers which comprise the church, operate and fulfill God's plan. The church in different times and at different locations, just as governments and individuals themselves, exhibit different types of gifts and fruits and also has varying degrees of each. It is God's grace which gives to the church in varying measures at different times, but likewise it is also the heart of the individual believer, the local church congregation, and even the church of a specific time which affects the grace and thereby the level and degree of fruits which God bestows. At some times even as with Israel in the flesh the church itself will have its heart closer to the world than what God desires. During these times the grace of God will judge, and chastise, the church to bring it back to where it is ordained by God's will to be. Likewise, in the times of greatest trial, tribulation and persecution the power and grace of God will be even more abundantly manifest as he seals his bride and keeps them who are put into his hand, even when we might appear to fall, he will lift us up and bring us again unto himself in mercy and tenderness. As it pleases the Lord he will use various members of his body to in turn support the weaker members and those in need through the ministries and the gifts which others themselves possess. This is what is meant when it states that the body will edify itself in love.

God's method of ministering to his bride the church can be broken down into three different categories. The first is general administrative functions within the church itself as a corporate body, the purpose of which is to assist the church in fulfilling its purpose in being a light unto a lost world. The second area involves special spiritual gifts which individual members of the church may receive by the grace of God, they are manifestations of the spiritual powers which God through the Holy Ghost has given to certain members of the church but which relate to edification of the church itself. The final area relates to spiritual fruits which individual believers are called upon to possess, these are the natural gifts which are brought forth in our hearts and lives when we are made new creatures through Christ living within us.

(a) The Offices and Operation of the Spirit within the Church Corporately

As a brief and general overview starting out we must ask ourselves, what is the church, and what is its role and purpose? The church in its simplest and most basic sense is a gathering together of believers in Christ Jesus as their personal savior. In the

broadest sense it is the entire body of Christ which, has, does, and will exist until such time as Christ returns to call his bride, the church, to be with him. The purpose of the church is to support our fellow members in the body of Christ, in each person's individual walk and relationship with God. The church also stands as a witness calling those whom Christ would hear his voice to him. To the world which can not, or chooses not to, hear the call of the Father; the church stands as a testimony of righteousness until the eventual time of judgment.

Where two or three are gathered together in my name there I am in the midst of them. [Mat. 18:20] see also James 4: 11-12. They went out and preached man should repent. [Mark 6:12]

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works, not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together... exhorting one another and so much the more as ye see the day [of the coming of the Lord] approaching. [Heb. 10: 24-25]

Abhor evil, cleave to that which is good, be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honor perfecting one another. Not slothful in business, feverent in spirit serving the Lord. Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer... of the same mind one to another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estates. Be not wise in your own conceits. [Rom. 12: 8-16] see I Peter 4: 8-11, I Cor. 11: 21-22. Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord. Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. [Eph. 5: 19-20]

The church, similar to the discussion of government, has a divinely ordained and established purpose by God upon this world. Unlike with worldly government in which power is the compelling factor, and men seek to exalt themselves and to further their own ambition and position, the church is called upon to exhibit and retain unto itself the spirit and attitude of Christ. This is foolishness to the world and as evaluated through wisdom of the world. Christ who being the Son of God, could and would have been entitled to take unto himself all the glory in this world, yet instead became a servant and became the sacrifice to save men from their sins.

The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can they know them because they are spiritually discerned; who hath known the mind of God, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. [I Cor. 2: 14-16]

Christ through his holy spirit has established the positions and the offices within the church. Unlike government which has a king, or president, within which all power and authority resides, and who exercise their authority to appoint others to various other positions, such as judges, and then exert authority and rule over those under them. The

church is established by Christ. Christ is the head of the Church, and unto him do we all serve. Within the church there are various roles and functions which are ordained in fulfilling Christ's purpose in this world. The difference is the attitude and spirit which these various offices are administered. We are set forth to minister in love unto Christ first, and then with love unto the other members of the church second, unto edification; and then reaching out to the lost.

Offices set forth related to the administration of the church are as follows: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Each of these positions are filled through the calling of Christ's will and grace in the hearts and lives of different individuals. Not every person is in fact called to one or more of these positions. Yet what the Bible does encourage us to do is to seek after a calling, and not just after a calling but unto the better callings. Within each of these offices, there is authority over other members of the body of Christ. We are called to submit ourselves unto the authority set over us, in various situations. At the same time those who are called and set in certain positions within the church must themselves answer to Christ for how they fulfill the responsibilities of their office.

At certain times we may find ourselves holding positions within the church which we might feel is beneath our social, educational or intellectual status. Yet we are placed in the proper place which God desires for us. As we discussed previously regarding Faith, we are called to accept where God has placed us in any particular circumstance, not to question him, or try to impose our own judgment for his own, but rather to seek after him. When we become resentful regarding our public position within the church that says more about us than what it does about God. We may feel we could do a much better job than someone else, yet it may be God's will to help a person develop themselves by holding that position, or it may just be to teach us patience and submission ourselves by allowing them to serve in a particular capacity, rather than ourselves. We are however encouraged to seek after greater use in Christ's kingdom and church. Yet we can not force our own way into the temple, through self-will, without doing great damage to ourselves and to those around us. Rather we are called to seek, and to knock; according to God's own grace he eventually will open the door he has prepared for us.

He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, til we come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God... speaking the truth in love, may grow into him in all things which is the head even Christ. From whom the whole body fitly joined together... in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto edifying of itself in love. [Eph. 4: 11-16]

In conjunction with the various offices there are also various other positions which support and edifies the ministries of the church. Some of the other offices specifically set forth in scripture include those of bishops and deacons, within the local church assembly. Paul sets forth the requirements for bishops and deacons in I Tim. 3.

See also Titus 1: 6-9, and further governance issues in I Tim. 5, 6. Within the context of fulfilling the role of the church within this world, there are also additional gifts or ministries other than those already set forth above. These other gifts which various members of the church are called to include primarily “spiritual” gifts: miracles, gifts of healing, and diversities of tongues (speaking in tongues as a part of the ministry and also their interpretation). Finally, there are also traditional supporting ministries and offices which is set forth as “helps” and “governments”. See I Cor. 12: 28-31 and Rom 12: 6-8. ‘Spiritual gifts’ need a proper spirit of use, and proper purposes within the church are set forth in I Cor. 12, 13, and 14.

Just as with governments in the flesh, it is the will of God that the church in its operations and functions should be handled in good order. Saul had the kingdom taken away from him because as king he offered sacrifice which was the role and responsibility of the high priest. It is easy sometimes within various of the higher ministries such as apostles, and pastors, to not give attention to some of the lesser members of the church such as helps and governments, especially when they may be contra to what the other offices desire. In the long run however, for the proper functioning of the church the continued ignoring of these lesser esteemed offices will cause to the weakening of the entire local church body, and even to the weakening of the stature of the church within the sight of the world. .

But when [Uzziah] was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction, for he transgressed against eh LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the alter of incense... the priest went in after him and with him fourscore priests of the LORD... they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him. It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah to burn incense unto the LORD but to the priests the sons of Aaron that are consecrated to burn incense; go out of the sanctuary... [II Chron. 26: 16-18]

... who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace [offering] which is administered by us... that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us. Providing for honest things, not only the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. [II Cor. 8: 18-21]

One of the most important issues which distinguish the church from other worldly organizations and government is the approach of God given to Christians relating to internal discipline and how the members of the church are to relate to one another in the administration of the church. Many of these elements come from the overall spirit which is expected of the individual members, and these will be discussed much more in detail subsequently, yet still these are expected to be manifested at the level of the Church “body” as a whole.

The first principle is that we are all, no matter of the outward position which we hold in the church organization, we remain subject unto the higher power. All the

members of the church are under the head which is Christ himself. It is Christ to whom each member of the church must answer, but those who hold higher position within the church, because of the authority given to them due to the position they have been granted, the greater the responsibility which is placed on them. Each of us regardless of where we may seem to appear in the overall organization still stand before the Captain of our salvation, and will bear responsibility for how we exercised the authority and responsibility of each of our positions, but we will also be answerable for how we developed the talents and abilities we were given; developing and growing them to the best of our ability and God's grace. Thus we must never forget the admonition to seek after the "best gifts" which Christ sets before us.

The first level of church authority and church discipline begins at the point where there is disagreement and feeling that someone who is a member of the church body has wronged another member personally, or has some matter, sin, which should be dealt with and because of which if unaddressed would cause harm to the church itself. We are instructed that concerning disagreement between brothers to discuss it with him alone. If he will not hear you, take two or three witnesses to establish it, if he will not hear them take it before the whole church; if he will not hear the church let him be like a heathen. Whatsoever we bind on earth will be bound in heaven, or loosed; if two will agree as to anything on earth, it will be done for them of the Father [See Mat. 18: 15-19]. The church body is thus given authority to exercise authority regarding discipline within itself. As professing members of Christ's body we are given responsibility to seek relief within the context of the church, and not to resort to the mechanism of the unsaved world, including the legal system, to resolve our disagreements. Even if we feel that the end result would still result in a unjust loss, or even some intentional wrong being committed by another member of the church, we are still charged to bear the loss if necessary. What we are given, especially within the scope of the church, is that Christ who knows all will judge the matter in one fashion or another. Yet what we are called upon to do is submit and to forgive.

Dare any of you, having a matter against another go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know the saints shall judge the world... we shall judge the angels... is it so, that there is not one wise man among you... why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? [I Cor. 6: 1-7]

Whether the situation involves a controversy, or disagreement between members regarding a personal matter, or a general disagreement regarding some decision involving organization and management of the church we are still commanded to submit to the order and authority established within the church.. When a member of the church refuses to follow the prescribed organizational authority within the church regarding a particular matter or in the matter of a controversy between members or even regarding a discovered sin, scriptures set forth a prescribed method for dealing with the person. The approach in this circumstance is different than how government provides according to the knowledge of the world. The world relies upon magistrates, and law enforcement, and bases its reactions to failure to comply with the law of the community upon physical force and

punishment. The church instead is based in its focus upon communion and fellowship, first with Christ, and next with each other as members of the same body. So when a member of the body refuses to operate within the defined order set forth by the local church body; the church and its members are charged to remove that member to separate that member from fellowship with the rest of the body. Physical force in relation to a controversy between members of the body is prohibited. Thus though a person may be separated from fellowship with the church because of his action and attitude, yet he like a prodigal son is still a son of the Father, and a brother or sister even if separated from the family. It is God's hands into which judgment, physical chastisement and hopefully reconciliation is committed. The church body is in fact commanded to stand ready in forgiveness, upon the separated member's repentance and returning, to receive them again in the arms of love. We are commanded in the administration of any discipline to exercise that authority in meekness and grace, remembering where we each and every one came from, and that it is Christ's love that brought us to where we are today within his body, and that it is Christ's continuing grace which keeps us still from falling again back into sin from which we have been redeemed. To the Lord we are his 'little ones' between each other we are 'brothers' "... ye are full of goodness, and filled with all knowledge, able to admonish one another." [Rom. 15: 14] We should remember that just like a individual the local church body itself can fall into self-righteousness, pride, and unforgiveness.

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief. [Heb. 13: 17]

Now we exhort you brethren, warn them that are unruly... abstain from the appearance of evil. [I Thes. 5: 14-22]

... ye withdraw yourselves from every brother who walks disorderly... if any man would not work, neither should he eat... some walk disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies... they (should) work and eat their own bread... if any obey not our word... note that man and have no company with him that may be ashamed, yet count him not as an enemy but admonish him as a brother. [II Thes. 3: 6-15]

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned and avoid the. For they are such as serve not our Lord Jesus Christ but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. [Rom. 16: 17-18]

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens and so full fill the law of Christ. [Gal. 6: 1-2] Law of Christ, love one another even as I (Christ) loved you.

Taking the step of removing someone from the church, because of sin, is a very difficult thing. It is literally like cutting off a part of your own body. Yet scripture says that is what we are required to do. Sometimes a situation can be God testing the church itself. We are forced to decide if we are committed to the righteousness of Christ or whether we love our own (church) body more. Not taking the action of cutting out the offending member can lead to the spiritual death of the entire local church body. Finally it is through cutting off, removing the member, which gives God the opportunity through grace to bring that member back to life again, through repentance, and place that person back again into the body of Christ. This process might not be possible without separation first.

These overt and outward ministries as set forth above are different than what government usually exhibits. There are necessary elements of worldly government which the church does have for proper and orderly administration. Yet within the hierarchy of importance they are listed at the bottom since these areas most closely related to the world itself. What the church focuses on, and its purpose of relating to the world is to shed forth the love of God through Christ, and to stand for righteousness. Everything in this world is temporary including government institutions, education and even our worldly knowledge. What the church is focused upon and calls the world unto is that which has foundations, the eternal word of God. All the higher ministries of the church revolve around the word of God, disseminating the message of Jesus Christ with anointing, either in capacity of an apostle, a prophet, an evangelist, a pastor, or a teacher. Even the attitude which these various offices are administered is opposed to the motivation which the world operates in the functions of government. Where self-interest, and vanity, and pride push people toward seeking higher office, the Bible says this is not to be the spirit which operates in the church. As will be described in greater detail to serve in authority within the church, the person must have a spirit of love, of preferring your brother above yourself, of humbleness, and must be a servant in attitude and approach.

(b) The Fruits of the Spirit and their Operation within the Individual Believer

Not every person is called to hold the same position within the church. The Bible states that God knows each of us and has in fact made each one of us unique, both in our character, and in how our aptitudes and personality develop over time and the experiences in our lives. Some people may be more adept at teaching, while others are called to be a pastor, or an evangelist, others still are just called to serve as a helper to the other ministries. Yet each of these has a value and worth in the eyes of God, as long as we are doing our best in the capacity we are in. Even though we are not all called to be pastors, or prophets, there are certain “fruits” which all believers as part of the church are to seek after and characteristics which we must work to develop. It is the presence of these characteristics and traits which give the church the unity which binds it together, allows it to adapt to changes in society and technology, and yet in the essence of its mission, and purpose, continue to remain the same throughout its history.

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us [see Rom 9: 18-23; also see discussion of Grace] whether prophesy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith. Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering, or he that teacheth on teaching, or he that exhorteth, on exhortation, he that giveth let him do it with simplicity, he that ruleth with diligence; he that showeth mercy with cheerfulness. [Rom 12: 6-8]

The first fruit of the spirit in the life of every Christian has to be one particular thing, it is upon this fruit that all of the other characteristics, strengths, spiritual fruits, and Christian ministries themselves are predicated. This first fruit of the spirit is love. It is thus love, upon which the entire Bible and the revelation of the nature and character of God point us towards. Righteousness, and the law, is predicated upon love. The nature of the revelation of righteousness under the law, as discussed previously is this; love the LORD thy God with all thy heart mind and soul, and love thy neighbor as thyself. Sin itself, is at its essence; expressed in the choice of a man to love himself, and seek after his own desires and interest, instead of the love of God first, and then of his neighbor. Pride is self-centered love, the desire to glorify and exalt oneself; this was Satan's sin. Judgment is based on what our heart loves, and the actions by which that love in our heart is manifest. Demas' falling away from Paul and the church, is expressed as his loving the present world instead of God. Finally grace, itself, is God's love for us that while we were yet sinners he gave himself for us that we might find salvation. Love begins with God; who created us and then redeemed us; but then it is our love which God desires from us; the decision to forsake the world and the cares of the flesh, and to bind ourselves unto God through Christ. Finally it is love which reaches out of the believer and out of the church, and calls the sinner unto the cross; and which gives the church the power to forgive upon repentance when one of its own falls and to bind them up again in love.

... love one another, for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill... Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law... But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof. [Rom 13: 8-14]

... As the branch can not bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches; He that abideth in me and I in him the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me he is cast forth and is withered... and cast them into the fire... If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified that ye, bear much fruit. If ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love... these things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment. That ye love one another as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants.. But I have called you friends... 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. These things I command you, that ye love one another. [James 15: 4-17]

The greatest gift we have as part of the body of Christ is that very spirit of God dwelling within us. It is in love that we will find our greatest fulfillment and perfection in this world. Our hope and expectation is to experience perfect love when we see Christ face to face. See I Cor. 13 Love/Charity is the essential element that comes from God through the salvation experience. That spirit of God (for God is love) is imparted in our lives. Love in its purest most godly form becomes the basis on which the other fruits themselves develop to their fullest and through which the gifts/ministries of the spirit must operate. Without the presence of love, there is no honor. We can heal, we can cast out devils, we can preach and bring others to Christ but it must be conducted in a spirit of charity, or in God's eyes the ministry will not be respected, our desire must be to glorify and exalt God, and to edify/serve others; not ourselves. See also Rewards. All the gifts of the spirit are to be used to the support and edification of all the members of the body. The gifts such as tongues should be used in conjunction with interpretation to exhortation, edification, comfort. See I Cor. 14 also Eph. 4: 12.

Love, faith, hope, all the spiritual fruits come forth from the seed of the word of God, brought to us through preaching. Once this seed comes into contact with our heart, to develop, to mature, to grow, requires our individual attention and dedication. Study to show thyself approved, prayer, fasting, mortifying of the flesh, casting down imaginations, and separation from the world, all these are among the ways the Bible sets forth that we allow the true fruits of the Spirit to grow and develop. Once the fruits of the spirit begin to blossom and spring forth, then we are in a position that God can bring forth various gifts of the spirit and show us the ministries he has for us, and even allow us to seek after "better" ministries.

Giving all diligence add to your faith, virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge temperance.. patience... godliness.. brotherly kindness...love... ye be neither barren... in knowledge of God. [II Peter 1: 5-8] (as the fig tree was found barren; or as the seed sown failed to bring forth fruit because of the nature of the soil)

The various other fruits of the spirit operate and are dispersed in much the same manner as the various positions and ministries of the church are. Namely they are distributed to each member according to the grace of God. We do not select our own gifts; we can seek after them and God will reward our seeking after more of him; in fact that is what pleases God most when we desire after more spiritual gifts and develop more spiritual fruit. Those who seek, will find, those who ask shall receive. It remains to God how much we will receive and when we receive it. As mentioned before, the mere act of seeking after spiritual things are not in and of itself what God desires and respects; but the desire we in fact have in seeking after them. Here again we are called back into a proper spirit and attitude of love toward God and toward our brother. Having all the

outward spiritual gifts in abundance given by God, yet when the desire is to exalt ourselves and to glorify ourselves will in the end profit us nothing with God. Spiritual gifts sought after, received from God, and in the end exercised in furtherance and with a spirit of love toward God allow for us to reach our maximum potential within God's plan for our lives.

In discussing the spiritual fruits and gifts there are really two different types which we will consider. The first are what can be viewed as the outward or public type ministries which most people notice and think of when discussing spiritual gifts. A few of these gifts are healing, miracles, prophesy, and discerning of spirits. You can think of these as the type of gifts which draw a crowd, which draw people in to witness and see for themselves. The second type is more of a latent type of gifts, the sort which are not obvious, which do not tend to exalt the bearer of the gifts and push them forward to the front of the line for general public acknowledgment. These types of gifts include: humbleness, meekness, longsuffering, forgiveness. These second type of gifts can exist without necessarily having any of the first outward spiritual gifts. Yet these second gifts are what can thought of as the rich soil; the foundation upon which all the other fruits and their proper operation within the church must be based.

There are diversity of gifts but the same spirit... [1] the word of wisdom... [2] word of knowledge... [3] faith.... [4] gifts of healing... [5] working miracles... [6] prophesy... [7] discerning of spirits... [8] diverse tongues... [9] interpretation of tongues... all these work by the selfsame spirit dividing to every man severally as he will. [I Cor. 12: 4-11] But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body as it hath pleased him. [I Cor. 12: 18]

Put on therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity [love], which is the bond of perfectness. Let peace of God rule your hearts... [Col. 3: 11-15]

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against such there is no law. [Gal. 5: 22-23] see also John 15. For the fruit of the Spirit is all goodness and righteousness and truth. Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. [Eph. 5: 9-10] Now the end of the commandment, is charity [love] out of a pure heart and of a good conscience and of faith unfeigned. [I Tim. 1: 5]

“And I brethren, could not speak unto you as spiritual, but as unto carnal even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk and not with meat... for ye are yet carnal; for whereas there are among you envying and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” [I Cor. 3: 1-3] ‘Babes in Christ’ is not God's final goal objective for our lives, he wants us to grow and mature, not to be swept back and forth by ever wind of

doctrine or by every change in our current situation, either in life, or how others treat us. We have to learn and grow in our spiritual life to put on the spirit of Christ in ourselves. Put off the attitudes of this world, our flesh, which is envying, strife, divisions, cares of the flesh. We must put on Christ, love, faith, kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness, serving others not ourselves. Despite however of all these shortcomings and all the need for further growth and development in their spirit, yet God still greatly loves each one of these ‘babes’ in that each has accepted Christ as Lord, and Christ had redeemed them by his blood. It is our duty as part of the body of Christ with these ‘babes’ to support them and not to cause them to fail in their infancy. When we discuss “babes” in the spiritual sense we are not discussing the actual age of a person, you can not just look at a person and say one is a babe or not, a very old person could be new creature in Christ in the most basic sense of the word. At the same time, the amount of time a person has been a member of a local church does not mean they are necessarily any less a “babe” in Christ in their development than a person who just walked through the doors and gave their heart to God.

If you never go beyond being a ‘babe in Christ’ in your spirit and attitude, then in the judgment you still will be saved through grace, by faith in Jesus. For those who never go beyond the basics of salvation, but whose focus on this world, all the things they place their efforts on in this world will be destroyed. The Bible states that only the things of God are eternal, his word is eternal. This world and the things of this world will pass away. What will remain in heaven are the spiritual things, those fruits of the spirit which we develop in this life and what we accomplish for God are what will abide and will be the basis which greater blessings are bestowed according to God’s will and grace. Those who seek after the things of God to the best of their ability will increase their reward in heaven. See Romans 3: 12-23. See Rewards in Heaven.

These fruits of the spirit are not only used as the basis upon which God will bestow some future blessing or reward in heaven. The fruits and ministries of the spirit are intended for our benefit and the edification of the church and the individual believer in this current world. The love which grows and develops in our lives towards God and matures into these various other spiritual fruits serves to strengthen us in our walk and relationship with God. During trials and tribulation it is the spiritual gifts living in our heart which allow us to hold fast to the hope and the promise of God. It is the love upon which faith and hope develop and mature and develops our character according to God’s will. Through trials our character and the spiritual gifts are perfected and purified. God desires to call unto himself a peculiar people, a people who are set aside through his grace, but also who through their love move forward in faith and set themselves apart unto God in the face of what the world views as foolishness or even persecutes. Faith which will sustain us and keep us, is the true faith based in love. That is why Christ taught the disciples that they must have the faith of a child, which through love of their parent has complete faith in their promise. This loving faith gives us the peace and confidence which stands through all the trials and storms we may encounter. It is only through childlike love of God which allows a man to put away his knowledge and understanding based on wisdom and knowledge after the world and the flesh, and hold on to God’s promise which relates to things which can not be seen. God can not have this

type of faith in love of himself; neither can the angels either be called upon for this type of faith. It is just this faith based on the unseen in love which is the basis for which praise, love, and service reaches its highest level in the eyes of God.

For we are saved by hope; but hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man seeth why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. [Rom. 8: 24-25]

For God hath not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. [II Tim. 1: 7] Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. [John 14: 27]

What the fruits of the spirit, predicated upon love of God, give us is the ability to walk victoriously in this life and in this world. The Holy Ghost living and residing in our lives leads us into truth and helps keeps us from sin and error in doctrine. The gifts discussed above thus prepare the way for our hearts and lives to move into deeper knowledge and revelation of God, and his will for our lives. Where before our imaginations and heart was under the dominion of sin today we have a heart which desires after the things of God, after spiritual things instead of the world. See also Eph. 6: 13-17 and I Thes. 5:8.

And thou, Solomon my son know that the God of thy father and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts, if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever. [I Chron. 28: 9] Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God... I have set my affection to the house of my God... [I Chron. 29: 2-3]

By the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice holy, acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service. Be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed, by renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good, and acceptable and perfect will of God. [Rom. 12: 1-2] see also Eph. 6: 1-9

The believer's walk within the church is one of the areas in which the fruits of the spirit find their fullest expression in love. We are called to be bound together, as brothers and sisters, as part of Christ's body in this world. Just as the body must be unified even with members who might seem to perform very different and sometimes even apparently opposing functions, yet together the body is unified and all things work together for a common purpose. This is also how the church, the body of Christ, is called to operate. Given the different personalities, understanding of scriptures, and even different individual consciences regarding issues which various individual's bring into the church, make the functioning of the church in unity a challenge. Yet it is a challenge which the

proper functioning of the fruits of spirit within the lives and hearts of different members makes possible.

Abhor evil, cleave to that which is good, be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honor perfecting one another. Not slothful in business, feverent in spirit serving the Lord. Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer... of the same mind one to another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estates. Be not wise in your own conceits. [Rom. 12: 8-16] see I Peter 4: 8-11, I Cor. 11: 21-22.

... be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity... give attendance to reading to exhortation, to doctrine. [I Tim.4: 12-13]

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward man. [Acts 24: 16]

Earlier we discussed Christians who were babes in Christ. When we use this term we are describing believers who even after accepting Christ as savior still have not, for whatever reason developed the fruits of the spirit, to overcome many of short comings in character which are found in the world. The Bible encourages us to leave the ways of the world and mature in Christ. Even after some Christians have become mature in Christ, and have went on to be able to handle the meat of doctrine; yet not every believer shares the same understanding of various issues which other believers have. What the fruits of the spirit operating in the hearts of individual saints within the church does is give the power to overcome the friction and even potential conflict which can so easily result within the body of the church from these differences.

When discussing this issue it is very easy to say that the “liberty of grace” which some may claim is in fact as discussed under the discussion of Grace is merely a shield under which they attempt to justify actual sin in their lives. As I will set forth in greater detail later, see discussion of Carnality, the Bible is very clear that certain actions are sin in and of themselves. Yet other things which the action or behavior alone may not appear to indicate sin, yet the spirit and attitude by which the action is taken can make it sin also. The Bible is clear that if a person claims to have some greater degree of liberty in regards to actions and what they view as sin in their conscience, for those people there is a higher burden placed on them to keep their heart open to the spirit of God to convict them and show them sin, under the threat that they may grow cold in their spirit and their heart may become hard so that sin which should convict them goes unnoticed. It is clear that God will judge sin in our lives and if we allow our conscience to become so hardened that we no longer realize the sin; yet we will not be excused in judgment when we stand before our Master to whom we will all give an account.

Still other brothers and sisters in Christ have what can be viewed as exceptionally tender consciences. This is not to say they are “babes” in Christ, rather they are made in

their personality and in their own conscience just as God desired and intended for them. Certain people have a understanding of what is right and nothing which is contrary to that understanding is acceptable. This isn't necessarily from a spirit of self-righteousness or pride but rather it comes from a spirit which God has given that person. It is given that believer for a purpose and it has pleased God for him to be that way. A person who takes an action against the understanding and conscience which God has given them would themselves be committing sin, just as much as another person who took some action which is a commonly understood sin. The Bible in describing different vessels within the house of the Lord starts out saying there are some vessels of honor and some to dishonor, see Grace. But it also goes beyond that, which states there are some vessels of gold, silver, brass, and iron. By the same standard you can say some people are vessels which are like porcelain, china, and crystal. Others are made like diamonds, marble, and ivory. When God created us and then called us, he had a will and a purpose which might be very different to fulfill a purpose which another person is not suited for. What we all do is stand before the same Creator and Savior, and we must seek for his will purpose for our lives. If we take it upon ourselves to change ourselves, out of self-will, not through God himself changing us or speaking to us and changing our heart then we stand in danger of taking ourselves out of God's will and going into sin under the eyes of God. Thus the person who is constrained within their own mind and conscience regarding some matter, that person is obliged to stand in what they believe they must do, or refrain from doing, according to God's will for their life.

My righteousness I hold fast and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live... For what is the hope of the hypocrite; though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul? [Job. 27: 6,8]

And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him... Beloved if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.. [I John 3: 19-21]

To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin. [James 4: 17]

If every believer were made completely uniform in their personality and their view of every issue then why would have God bothered in calling so many individuals to himself? He would have saved one "perfect" person and that would have been sufficient. Yet that is not the approach that God has taken. He has called many people, from many places, with vastly varying personalities all unto him. At the same time the blood of Christ has taken this menagerie of people and has made us one in him. For some people even in the church for whatever reason their personality just does not square with us, maybe it's their approach or something about how they act, yet there is no question that they are just as saved as we are. God loves them just as much as he does us. He sees beauty and worth in them, just as he through his grace sees the beauty value and worth of ourselves. God takes pleasure in diversity, not everything or everyone has to be exactly the same. Each snow flake is different. The more we know of the universe which God

created there is likewise diversity beyond measure. Each of us has a purpose and a unique place in God's eyes.

The fruits of the spirit are available within the lives of different believers. Yet not every person will have the same fruits or ministries which any other particular believer may possess. Moreover the fruits and ministries which do develop in our lives may be displayed and realized in very different way than another brother and sister in Christ. All this goes back again to the aspect of uniqueness which exist in each saint of the Lord. This is not to say that everyone is perfect, in fact each one of us is uniquely imperfect within ourselves and when we attempt to operate within our own wills. How we are each made perfect is through Christ and through his love and blood upon our heart and lives.

How does the body of Christ in this world, the church, manage to function with so many different "vessels" butting up against each other, yet without the direct physical head of the church present with us, solving our differences and disagreements as they arise? The answer is that the Holy Ghost which abides within us, and the spirit of love which exist and gives us the grace, and wisdom to deal with each other. Without the presence of all the various gifts of the spirit operating within the church then there is no way that unity can be maintained over a long period of time. Sometimes a gift of one member of the church may be stirred up to help minister within some problem within other members. In fact it is sometimes the disagreements which naturally arise in the flesh and attitudes of various members which allow the opportunity for those members to grow and develop greater fruits of the spirit themselves to reach a resolution according to the will of God for them.

The fullest utilization of the fruits of the spirit described above are shown just in the circumstance where there is some matter which different members of the body of Christ have some disagreement regarding. The question can be whether some particular thing itself is sin, which is again not something commonly understood in doctrine as fitting in that criteria as such. Paul gave instruction to both parties in this situation, and indicated the proper function of the fruits of spirit and how they should operate. The situation Paul dealt with involved, particular types of food which might be eaten, and where the food was eaten, and finally what sorts of activities were proper on certain days. From the beginning when gentiles were saved the apostles in Jerusalem set out certain standards which gentiles were told to abide by. Those included not eating of food which contained blood, and of not engaging in fornication. At various times in corresponding with the gentile churches, Paul stated that the members should not make inquiry regarding the type of food that they ate, where it came from, or what it contained. His reason given was for conscience sake. Yet it is clear that Paul himself did not have any moral problem with what sort of food it was that he ate, and he never actively preached the dietary restriction, in and of themselves, as part of his own doctrine.

We are instructed concerning a brother who does not regard a particular activity as sin, and his attitude and awareness of those who may not share his understanding. The first issue is whether or not, and to what extent, the discussion should occur at all. Those who a person knows from their prior experience with the person or after time you figure

out has what could be termed, weak faith, or rather a tender conscience, in regards to a particular subject, they should not even discuss particular subjects. If you know your position would cause confusion for a brother or sister, which might lead them to taking some action which is against their own understanding and appreciation of what is sinful you should not engage in a discussion of the matter, and try to convince them. The spirit of love and consideration for a weak member of the body must control our conversation, even if we are sure in our own hearts of our own position, and even on what doctrinal basis which we can base our understanding. Sometimes it may even be necessary out of love for another not to engage in some activity which we are fully assured in ourselves is acceptable before God yet because of another member who we know is offended we are called upon to support them even in giving up of our individual freedom under the circumstances.

Him that is weak in faith receive ye, but not in doubtful disputations. One believeth he may eat all things, another who is weak eat herbs let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not, and let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth, for God hath received him, who art thou to judge another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea he shall be holden up for God is able to make him stand ... one man esteem one day above another, another esteem every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind... whether we live we live unto the Lord, and whether we die we die unto the Lord... we are the Lord's... let us not judge one another any more but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or occasion to fall in his brother's way... it is good neither eat flesh nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby your brother stumbleth, or is offended, or made weak. Hast thou faith? Have it to yourself before God... he that doubteth is damned, if he eat because he eat not of faith for whatsoever is not of faith is sin. [Rom 14] See also Philip. 2: 12-13

This liberty of yours becomes a stumbling block to them that are weak... shall not the conscience of him that is weak, be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols; and through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin against the brethren and wound their weak conscience you sin against Christ. [I Cor. 8: 9-12]

...When ye sin against the brethren and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. I please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit.. That they may be saved. See I Cor. 10: 23-33

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these thing serveth Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. [Rom. 14: 17-19]

Paul addresses the person who feels that some activity of another brother or sister may not be meeting the standard of righteousness required by God; he states they must utilize the fruits of the spirit. The fruits are just as important in this context as they are in the former one. The believer is called upon to exercise restraint and brotherly kindness and meekness regarding doubtful things. As discussed previously regarding governance issues within the church body, if a person is offended or concerned they are called upon to discuss the situation with their brother or sister. If the matter is truly serious enough, which would constitute a sin which can affect the functioning and unity of the church itself, then the matter should be brought before the church leadership, and finally the church body for discipline as a last resort.

Before reaching this stage, the offended believer is called upon to approach the situation with the spirit of a servant, humbleness, and meekness; the same spirit which the person who themselves through this actions might have offended them is called upon to possess. In deciding on how to approach and handle a situation the person whose own conscience is offended needs to evaluate their true motivation. We already discussed how the person who does not feel their action constitutes a sin; may in fact be deceiving themselves; through the mantle of grace. Similarly, the one who takes it upon themselves to pronounce some action as sin; may themselves be motivated by something other than a spirit of love for the perceived offender or even love of the righteousness of God alone. In fact the Bible makes it clear when it warns us against judging others; who are we to judge another's (God's) own servant, if that servant is sinning against his master (God), then the master will judge the servant, but not the other person. See Romans 14: 4. It may even be that our judgment can be based on some series of motives; which are themselves indication of sin in our own life. Just a few of these can be self-righteousness, pride, trying to elevate ourselves through our "concern" for others in the eyes of those around us or within our own mind; or just bitterness; and ending finally in unforgiveness.

As with all things concerning the body, and members of the body of Christ, our actions must be based upon love of God first, and next love of one another. We should seek to support and lift up one another, encourage one another to edify one another in love. When there arises a situation which our conscience causes us to doubt or to be unsure. We should bring the need before the throne of God, in intercession if we believe a brother is going astray and ask God to open their eyes. Then if we still feel directed by the holy spirit to mention the matter; it should be brought to the other member in humbleness and love; as befits brothers and sisters together. We are in fact commanded to bear one another's burden in love. So before confronting someone about our concern for them or some concern about any of their behavior; we should be ready to in fact take that burden upon our own shoulders; whatever that may require; instead of like the Pharisee and lawyer in Jesus' time merely piling some heavier burden upon another; who may already be stumbling under the load. See a further related discussion in Believer's Thoughts and Attitudes.

... Beloved building up yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost. Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of

our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And some have compassion making a difference. And other save by fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless, before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. [Jude 1: 20-24]

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of any holiday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ. [Col. 2: 16-17]

The individual believer operating through the Holy Ghost, which is the spirit of Christ living within us, calls us to minister in love to all those around us both in the church and without. In either situation the light shines forth. The power of love and grace which brought Jesus forth to a lost world, and finally led him to the cross to die for that same world, is the same spirit which we are called unto today. The fruits of the spirit realized within our life; must turn us towards the strengthening of the body of Christ. Regardless of the specific ministry which might operate through us; the purpose is edification not of ourselves but as a servant those with whom we come into contact. As the fruits of the spirit bear more and more fruit; the self-interest and desires of this world which before controlled us fade away; as we look in love toward our Lord who beckons us toward a New Jerusalem.

Giving no offense in any thing; that the ministry be not blamed, but in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments... by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned... as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor yet making many rich... [II Cor. 6: 3-10]

But what things were gain to me, those I count loss for Christ. Yea doubtless and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.. Not having my own righteousness... but through faith in Christ. [Philip 3: 7-9]

Visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and keep himself unspotted from the world. [James 1:27]

Wisdom is one of the fruits of the spirit which the child of God has the promise to receive. The Holy Ghost is come to teach us, and to reveal God's will to us when we are in a situation in which we do not have a clear path to take. In the last times, in times of trouble and of apostasy, when the world attempts to turn darkness into light and light into darkness, it is the spirit dwelling within the members of the church which will allow us to stand in the truth. There will in fact come a time where Satan will be given the power to work wonders in this world such as if it were possible even the church itself should be

deceived. Yet it will be the Holy Ghost in the hearts of God's church which will allow the church to hear the voice of the shepherd of their souls and not to follow after another. This ability to discern godliness and sound doctrine, and the ability to keep your heart set toward God in the last times; will be based on preparing our own hearts, through study, prayer, and fasting. Just as Jesus stated that some spirits are not cast out without a level of dedication and preparation in the disciples life; the same is the case for revelation and knowledge of the revealed will of God. But if we will seek; after God we do have the assurance that he will be found and in fact is never far from us.

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ... [II Peter 3: 18]

It is the glory of God to conceal a thing; but the honor of kings to search out a matter. [Prov. 25: 2]

Neither give heed to fables.. Which minister questions, rather than godly edifying, which is faith so do. Now the end of the commandment is charity [love] out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned. [II Tim. 1: 4-5]

Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. [II Tim. 2:15]

For everyone that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But strong meat belong to them that are of full age even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. [Heb. 5: 13-14]

CHOICE: CHRIST'S AND THE BELIEVER'S RELATIONSHIP TOGETHER

Believer's Thoughts Attitudes:

Under the preceding discussion the concentration was upon the natural fruits and gifts of the spirit which the Holy Ghost gives to the individual believer. Yet having these various fruits made available to the believer does not mean that all or even some of them will be developed to the extent desired by God. What we do with the blessings and opportunities which God lays before us is dependent upon our own attitude and motivation towards the things of God. It is up to us whether we want the field of our heart and mind basically to lay dormant with just a few small sprouts and vines trying to survive on their own naturally, or whether we roll up our sleeves and continue to plow the field, irrigate the land, and pull up the weeds so that the fruits grow and abound to their fullest extent possible.

Earlier we discussed our attitudes towards the word of God. There were three divisions; love of God and his word; the realization of our duty under the law; and lastly, corrupting God's word to merely justify ourselves. Whether we love God and his word is a product of our heart, and our choice. What we place our time effort into will bear fruit; whether that is after the spirit in righteousness; or after the world unto the flesh. Either path which we choose, will bear fruit, and will become clearly known. Love is a choice when faced with two options, after our flesh we by our nature are drawn to the world; and after the spirit we are naturally drawn unto God. We can not love the world and truly love Christ. We will love one or hate the other, the true answer we make to this choice between these two may not be known or obvious until some trial, tribulation, or temptation arises to make our decision clear.

Casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. [II Cor.10: 5]

One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple... when thou saidest, seek ye mine face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.. [Ps. 27: 4, 8]

All my bones shall say, LORD who is like unto thee... [Ps. 35: 10]

Even as members of the body of Christ, the church, in this world we are not immune to the temptations and the attitudes which arise naturally out of our flesh. Every day we must constantly seek to renew our hearts and minds in the spirit; because left alone we will naturally fall back into the attitude of the world. Local congregations of

the church as a group can grow cold, but this happens because first of all various members of the church themselves let their hearts and attitudes move closer to the world and away from the things of God. This cold spiritual state is compounded and grows just as the various members are able to justify themselves because they say, “I am not nearly as worldly as some other brother and sister.” Our hope and confidence still remains in Christ, and in his grace, that through repentance we can be renewed again through the love of God, expressed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? And for the end those things is death. But now being made [free] from sin, and become servants unto God... [Rom. 6: 21-22] Contrast with Rom 1: 32.

Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another. [Gal. 5: 26]

Be ye angry and sin not, let not the sun go down on your wrath. Neither give place to the devil. [Eph. 4: 26-27]

... they measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. [II Cor. 10: 12]

For if a man think himself to be something when he is nothing he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden. Be not deceived God is not mocked whatsoever a man soweth he shall also reap...of flesh... corruption.. of spirit reap life everlasting. [Gal. 6: 3-8]

Within our own lives, and within the church, we are called upon to exercise two distinct functions and each of these are themselves subject to abuse if used without the correct attitude and fruits of the spirit operating within the believer's heart and within the local church. These two functions are judgment; but also forgiveness. In our earlier discussion we focused on both these elements, within the context of the nature and character of God [the element of forgiveness is discussed within the context of grace]. Thus within the church, we are called to possess these qualities, and it will be how we utilize this authority which God himself reserves the right to judge the believer themselves.

First of all the members of the body of Christ are called to judgment, in matters involving the church, and issues relating to sin within the church. Jesus in his teaching consistently throughout his ministry gave warnings regarding judging others. We must remember the environment in which Jesus lived; the Jews understood judgment as under the terms of the law, and as concerning outward righteousness. Jesus warned the Pharisees and scribes who constantly judged others, and yet their own hearts were cold towards God, and were filled with iniquity themselves even as they proceeded to judge the failings of others. As we have discussed the true essence of the law in the Old

Testament was calling for a right spirit of love unto God and unto your neighbor, but over time it degenerated into mere outward formality and legalism. Jesus as the law, through his life and his death, became the basis for judgment under the true standards of the law which will be applied to all humanity.

Similarly, through the power of his spirit now living and residing within the church, the individual believers are now empowered and directed to exercise judgment in questions of righteousness and sin. Authority for judgment is placed in the hands of the church. It is how the church and its members chose to exercise, or not to exercise, this element of judgment which God will evaluate us, and show exactly how spiritual or carnal the state of the church is. As we move farther from God judgment becomes one of two things; either it falls back under mere strict outward formalism and legalism, and the church becomes like nothing more than an assembly of scribes and Pharisees during Jesus time, taking pleasure in pronouncing judgment while their own hearts and lives with Christ are nothing but a whitened tomb itself. The other option is that the church refuses to judge sin at all; it refuses to call anything sin. It hangs its hat on the concept of all-encompassing grace; and refuses to acknowledge that any activity is sin, or should be pronounced such by others who except for grace themselves are sinners. What this approach does is abrogate its God given responsibility. And though they are correct that all the members themselves are sinners except for the grace of God and the blood of Christ; they chose not to remember that through the blood we are made new creatures through Christ, and as new creatures we obliged to judge by God.

Paul applied this responsibility constantly in his various letters to the churches. He gave his opinion on various issues which he heard was arising within the churches. In one particular matter, he publicly rebuked the church leadership for doing nothing when there was a situation in which an overt sinful condition was allowed to remain within the church body. He stated that the person who was known to be sinning should have been removed from fellowship and communion with the church. The church had abrogated its duty in not already judging the sin within its own local body. It must also be remembered that in this same situation, Paul later wrote back that the local church should bring back into its fellowship the member who had repented and was sorrowful for their sin. Thus Paul, in using his authority in judgment, exercised this power within the spirit of love; that the purpose was not for permanent separation from the body but to bring the sinner unto repentance with the hope of renewed fellowship again in the body of Christ. Judgment properly used, is thus predicated upon the proper use of the fruits of the spirit; first of all the spirit of love; and then meekness, humbleness, and wisdom; yet also with faith; confidence; and assurity as the situation dictates, through the leading of the Spirit. Jesus' life gives us vastly differing approaches to judgment based on the circumstances. In one instance, Jesus judged by merely bending down and writing in the dirt; in another he made a whip from cords and ran the moneychangers out of the temple and overturned their tables.

For I verily, as absent in the body but present in the spirit have judged already... But now have I written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator or covetous... such a one not

to eat [fellowship with]. For what I do to judge them also that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? But [they] that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. [I Cor. 5: 3-13] see also II Cor. 2: 6-11 for forgiveness (elated to the same situation).

The flip-side of judgment, is forgiveness, 'Forgiveness' and judgment of others are of great importance to God as those characteristics are reflected in the lives and hearts of his children. As we take on Christ we can and should judge righteousness and evil in ourselves and in the world around us. However this judgment is to be tempered by the spirit of love, forgiveness, meekness which comes from spirit of Christ. Judgment requires that our own heart and spirit are right, for that reason a spirit of forgiveness must first be present. Judgment without forgiveness will lead to a spirit of self-righteousness, hatred of sinner along with the sin; and blindness to sin and improper spirit and attitude in our own heart and life. Judgment of others is simple; self-judgment is difficult and requires the help (grace) of God. [see Mat. 7: 1-5]. God loved us and gave himself for us while we were yet sinners. God says our duty is to forgive (seventy times seven) as long as our brother repents, and to show kindness toward those who despitefully use us [Mat. 18: 22]. God does say that he will avenge us against those who abuse his little ones. We can not forget the wrongs done to us but we can forgive - that is an act of our own will/attitude. Let go of the pain, bitterness, hatred, resentfulness that the offense created and reach out again, turn the other cheek.

Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not and ye shall not be condemned, forgive and ye shall be forgiven... for with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.... Thou hypocrite cast out first the beam out of thine own eye then shall ye see clearly to pull the mote out of thine neighbor's eye. [Luke 6: 37-42]

In the Lord's Prayer Jesus goes so far as to say God's forgiveness is predicated on our attitude of forgiveness unto others [Mat. 6: 9-14] Finally Jesus in his parable discusses the Master who forgave a servant a great debt, that servant went out and did not forgive a fellow servant who only owed him a very small amount. When the master learned of this he brought back that debt (previously forgiven) and sent the servant to be tormented (hell). [see Mat. 18: 21-35] This would indicate that many people who believe they are saved and yet refuse to forgive for some offense against them, and hold on to their bitterness and other attitudes of the heart associated therewith will not be found written in the Lamb's book of life. Not having right attitude relating to forgiveness leads to other attitudes of the heart, fear, doubt which are abominations in the sight of God. See further discussion of fear and doubt under Fruits of Unrighteousness.

Once forgiveness is sought, through repentance, then through God's own example the burden is on us to extend forgiveness to them in a spirit of love and mercy. See example of God's forgiveness of Israel, I Kings 8: 33-36. There is a burden, placed on each of us, to extend forgiveness even as we have ourselves been forgiven. In the final judgment, separating the wheat from the tares, there are some who actually believe they

are saved (their outward holiness and righteousness) yet when God will judge their heart they will be found lacking. God will bring to account the sins and transgressions of many who claim to have committed their own sins in repentance to Christ yet in their heart and feelings toward others who have offended them or who they know have committed some transgression in their personal lives, they refuse to forgive them, just as they accept their own forgiveness. Having a spirit of spitefulness, bitterness, fear, doubt, is abomination to God, just as much as fornication and murder.

Forgiveness can be one of the very hardest things to do and it is through Christ's spirit in our own heart residing we can have the power to do this. Depending on the facts and circumstances of each individual their experiences this may seem impossible but as with all things with God, through his love, patience and grace all things are possible. There will be disagreements, hurts and even wrongs suffered by those in the body of Christ, or by those who later come to Christ. Peter asked how many times he should forgive his brother who sinned against him but who asked forgiveness. Jesus basically says to just continue forgiving. Godly sorrow produces repentance. It is important to remember that true repentance (result of godly sorrow) precedes God's forgiveness. True forgiveness requires the fruit of the spirit that come directly from God himself, love in its purest sense. As Christians we put on Christ. Christ as the eternal God made flesh is the perfection of righteousness which demands judgment but at the same time through love provides a way of forgiveness even if that requires sacrificing of oneself. See John 3: 16, and Eph. 4: 32.

He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother is in darkness even until now... and knoweth not whither he goeth, because their darkness hath blinded his eyes. [1 John 2: 9-11]

In this life by the standards criteria that we practice judgment without forgiveness God will use the same standard in judging our lives as opposed to grace. [see Mat 7:2 and Mat. 18: 35, and Mat 6: 14-15 and James 2: 13] see also discussion in Final Judgment. Forgiveness thus calls us to bear a cost in our own bodies, and minds, for a debt which we do not owe but rather which someone rightly owes us, for some wrong which we did not cause. In so doing we fulfill the commandment, and example, of Christ. Yet we are also given the promise that our own debts will be covered, not to be remembered against ourselves when we stand before Christ in judgment.

...[Peter unto Simon] thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me... [Acts 8: 20-24]

There is one final aspect of forgiveness relating to the individual believer's mind and attitude which is not so often considered but is of equal importance to the concept of the forgiveness of others. That is the importance of forgiveness of oneself. We say that we have placed our sins before Christ, and they have been washed by the blood and

forgiven us. That statement is exactly correct. Why then is it that for some people, they never forgive themselves? The requirement of forgiveness applies to our own mind towards our personal past as much as to others. Yet many people say still say I simply can not escape my past, my failures, and my hurt of others. What we often confuse is the concept of remembrance and that of forgiveness. Only God can forgive and forget, through his sovereign power. As people we can not help but remember our past, yet what we can do is forgive ourselves. We can move on to become the people whom God desires us to be, to accomplish what God wants us to accomplish. Reliving our past keeps us from being able to move forward in the spirit of deliverance and joy, which is truly ours through the blood of Christ. We are now new creatures in the eyes of God, and that is what matters in the end. Some people, and even our own memory, will try to remind you of your past, but it is our love and faith in God that lets us acknowledge where we came from, yet the assurance of knowing that is not who we are today. David lied, committed adultery, and murder; yet the Bible says he was a man after God's own heart, because of his attitude. Concerning his sin, David said they were constantly before his eyes (memory) yet at the same time he said that they were forgiven by the blood, that he had been washed and cleansed by God, and for that fact he was now clean, before the eyes of the only one who mattered. David's faith and love of God must be our attitude toward the forgiveness of ourselves for our own sins and failures. What is of concern for God in the life of the saved believer is where we are today, and what he desires for us tomorrow.

... 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. [Philip. 3: 13-14]

Believer's thought and attitude relate most fundamentally therefore in how we develop and maintain our relationship, with God, with others, and finally with ourselves. We have to work actively at keeping our hearts and attitudes correct. Either we are moving closer to God or we will find ourselves moving back again towards the world. Just a few of the things which help us strengthen and develop our spiritual life, is the heart of praise and thanks to Christ for who he is, for what he has done, and for what he is going to do. Next is what we choose, to think and meditate upon, these are the things which indicate where truly our heart is, and the true direction that we are pointed in our lives. Thus, Paul encourages us to sing unto ourselves, psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs, let these things be in our subconscious as well as upon our lips.

Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice. [Philip. 4: 4]

Finally brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things. [Philip. 4:8]

... I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content, I know both how to be abased and.. How to abound... I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. [Philip. 4: 11-13]

It is important that we constantly evaluate what is it that we desire after, what do we take pleasure in, and finally why do we enjoy it. Not everything which we enjoy is sin. Yet to the extent that activity inserts itself between us and our relationship with God it becomes a danger, if not a sin. Each person has their own individual areas of weakness which to another believer would not be sin in itself to God. Yet that activity or its effect on that person's own life, and that it defiles their conscience is sin, and must be treated as sin. I Cor. 11: 31. See further discussion under Fornication Adultery and other Fleshly Sins.

Carnality in the Believer's Life

As we have been discussing, choice is one of the essential component which categorizes the relationship between God and man. Choice is the manifestation, the decision which man makes in regards to the call of God. Righteousness is the state of Godliness, and what we are commanded to seek unto, and the standard which we have commanded that our actions will be measured against, both under the law, and under the standard of grace of Christ. Either we prove ourselves righteousness under our own works (impossible in comparison to Christ) or we are found righteous through the saving blood of Christ Jesus applied to our hearts. Particular choice can be based on a wide variety of reasons. It can be based on duty, it can be based on fear of punishment, it can be based on love.

Ultimately choice is based on love. Love for yourself, love for others, love of God. Each person loves themselves, this is natural. All things proceed from this initial basis. Yet this does not mean that because we love ourselves this becomes the end of the analysis. It is in fact the beginning point upon which the fullest development of love, and the resulting choices which we make proceed. Love thy neighbor (others) as thyself, is one of the basic commandments of the law. Thus we start out with love of self first, but that love must be focused outward. It is love of self, which moves outward to God. Man is created in the image of God. Thus loving God is in reality the acknowledgment and love of the source from which we in our ultimate sense derive meaning, from which we live and move and have our being. Spiritual faith is this love of God calling us to our maker and the lover of our soul.

We have just discussed some of the spiritual fruits and manifestation which derive from our choice to accept Christ in our heart, and become part of his church in this world, yet not of this world. The world and the church (body of Christ existing in individual believers) are not and never will be in unity. The world is constantly pulling the individual believer unto focusing and providing for his fleshly desires and "needs" at the expense of spiritual things. According to the standards and criteria of this natural world, the things of God, and the priorities of the church, are foolishness. The world does not see the benefit of turning away from the joys which this world provides, its pleasures, its recreation, and its joys. Yet Christ and becoming a new creature through salvation experience; gives us a new heart, a desire after spiritual things which did not exist previously.

Many times philosophy, political ideology, or other religious beliefs seek to give meaning to life; beyond what is thought of as the purely physical or base needs in life. Even in their highest and noblest expression they are only substitutional and momentary. They do not wash away sins; they do not call our heart unto a eternal communion relationship which only comes through Jesus Christ. As with so many different things in life, our heart is constantly seeking to be filled, in the basic needs sense, in terms of fellowship, in terms of intellectual needs. One way or the other, the world can and will

provide different substitutes in all these areas which will appear to satisfy and fill, yet under judgment we all will have to stand and give account for which we do place our confidence in. Through the Bible we know that the only thing which will abide in judgment is the heart and life which is in Christ Jesus.

As discussed earlier regarding Believer's Attitudes there are certain fruits of the spirit which help us grow and develop our character in a manner which is closer to Christ himself. But as with a garden or a field which is planted to bring forth particular food in the natural world, this is a product of active cultivation on the part of the individual. Left alone, or without sufficient effort applied to the seed which is planted all the fruit will dry up or will be strangled by the natural growth of other plants or weeds which spring up naturally. The spiritual fruits are not the natural result of man's life. The cares, concerns, and attitudes of this life are the natural occupants of the field of our life. They will grow and flourish naturally without any effort on our own part, all that is required is inattention to the fruits which the spirit of Christ desires to develop within us. As our attitude and love for the things of God, begins to cool, the various fruits which grow in our heart change. Unfortunately the cares of this world, allows our attitude to change slowly over time, making it possible to tell ourselves that what we are feeding our heart, minds, and desires upon are "almost" the same, and our spiritual senses become dulled to the extent that the substitutes provided by the world feel as satisfying today as what we now remember the true things of God did. While the fruits of the spirit we had received at one time heightened our moral sense, making us aware of sin in our life, and desirous of things of the spirit; now the things of the world, really serves as an anesthesia, deadening our conscience and heart. A brief list of some of the items of carnality which can arise in a believer's life are: debates, envy, wrath, strife, backbiting, whispering, tumults, uncleanness, fornication, lasciviousness.

How is it that an individual who has a vibrant relationship with God, and has cultivated spiritual gifts, should find themselves under the bonds of sin, and the cares of the world, as much, or probably much greater, than before they ever found Christ? The short answer to this is that over time, they let the desire of their heart change; it is not something which happens suddenly but rather a slow shift, or drift, away from a love for the things of God. Where before the word of God had been their joy, the thing which they had taken pleasure in meditating upon; slowly this passion became more of an duty, a knowledge of its importance; and a obligation to do what is commanded by the law; until finally they find some way to change in their mind what the law is, or rather to change it to what they desire it to be so that the law now justifies them in the action which before they knew to be sin without question.

There is one first basic outward manifestation of this slide from righteousness unto sin. One thing which tends to reflect this turning back to the world which God through his grace redeemed us from. This first, basic, indicator is where we find our satisfaction and joy in the area of fellowship. What is the atmosphere in which we like to be present? This is one of the reasons for why the Bible is constantly encouraging Christians not to forsake the gathering of themselves together. The fellowship of the saints, supporting each other, encouraging each other in love is of crucial importance.

Each person will seek support, fellowship, and encouragement from somewhere and from some person or group. Finally we will gravitate toward and seek support from those whom we love, and whom we desire to be a part of. The people who most clearly reflect our own view and attitudes will be who we desire to have fellowship with, who we will truly enjoy fellowship with. Where our body is does not necessarily reflect our righteousness or our sin. At times our work environment may not be a Christian environment, sometimes we can not help that, yet we can control our attitude and desire to be in that environment and enjoying it. Christ himself ate with publicans and sinners, and was chastised for it. Yet what Christ did was to change the environment by his presence, not to be changed by the environment. Christ's purpose was to reach sinners, and the sick, to bring the gospel of grace to those in need, not to take pleasure in the sin from which they needed deliverance. Too often today people claim to be fulfilling the call of Christ in their fellowship with sinners, or presence in locations where pleasure in unrighteousness abounds; yet their reason is because they enjoy the location themselves instead of delivering any sinner from it themselves.

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather reprove them. [Eph. 5:11] Be not unwise but understanding what the will of the Lord is. [Eph. 5: 17]

And Jehu... the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehosaphat, should thou help the ungodly and love that hate the LORD? Therefor is wrath upon thee from before the LORD. Nevertheless there are good things found in thee... and host prepared thine heart to seek God. [II Chron. 19: 2-3]

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night... Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous; but the ways of the ungodly shall perish. [Ps. 1: 1-6] I have not sat with vain persons neither will I go with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil doers; and will not sit with the wicked. I will wash mine hands in innocency; so will I compass thine altar, O LORD. That I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works. LORD I have loved the habitation of thy house and place where thy honor dwelleth. Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men; in whose hands is mischief and their right hand is full of brides. But as for me, I will walk in mine integrity; redeem me and be merciful unto me. [Ps. 26]

Thus when we turn around and discover that we are no longer looking forward to being with the church, but rather desire and seek after the companionship of people, and stay in locations which in previous times we would not have felt comfortable, this is the clearest indication of a change in our heart; if we are still even able to acknowledge this

change. Once we can ask the question, and can honestly answer it, we are led to the conclusion that what we put our desire, and love into before is not where we are today. At least upon reaching this conclusion we can have the opportunity to again make a choice. Whether to proceed in the direction we are now headed or will we begin over again to rebuild the house, and replant the field which we have let fall into decay. The saddest of all situations is never to comprehend the change in spiritual direction and never feel the need to re-evaluate the course of our life.

We previously discussed Christian judgment of sin within the church. As we discovered the method of judging sin between brothers and sisters in the church was by the restriction of fellowship. The purpose was to show the sinner, that their behavior was unacceptable to the church body, and to bring them back to repentance and finally back within the assembly of the saints. Nowhere in scripture is the church allowed to physically punish or intimidate a person who had sinned. This authority rests alone with God in the area of chastisement, and ultimately in judgment. How exactly God chooses to exercise this authority rests in him alone.

Deliver such an one [fornicator] unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus... purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump... keep not company if any man is called a brother be a fornicator or covetous... do not ye judge them within...[I Cor. 5: 5-13] see also II Cor. 2: 6-11 of forgiveness (same situation).

Unfortunately the church body itself can become cold in their corporate love of Christ, just as much as in the life of an individual believer. This condition is much worse because outwardly and among themselves they are deprived of the aspect of separation from fellow believers. An individual believer's separation forces them to evaluate their behavior and conduct. When the entire church becomes cold in their spiritual life, then it is even easier to justify their own action and conduct within themselves and to themselves. In such a case, except some outside person or condition forces them to evaluate their spiritual condition they will become even farther and farther removed from the truth. The Old Testament and Israel stands as an example of a people who though professing a special relationship to God, still did not have an attitude or spirit any different from the world around it. In fact they can desire to be fully joined with the world and despise their separation.

I have fed you with milk not with meat, for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal and walk as men. [I Cor. 3: 2-3] see also II Cor. 12: 20-21

The sins of the people of Israel in the wilderness are given to believers as examples and warnings. I Cor. 10: 1-11 see Heb 3: 8-9 regarding hardening their hearts in unbelief.

Be not deceived; evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness and sin not, for some have not the knowledge of God.... [I Cor. 15: 33-34] see also James 3: 1-18

... that ye receive not the grace of God in vain... be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness... for ye are the temple of the Living God... wherefore come out from among them; and be ye separate saith the Lord... [II Cor. 6: 1-17]

The freedom of choice as to our individual, and church-body's, walk with God is the basic continuing freedom which God has given unto us. He will never take away this choice regardless of how we decide to exercise it. When our love of God grows cold, and our desire for his spirit, his word, and his law, diminishes we can always walk away. Yet we can also seek renewal again, in fellowship and love through repentance. What God gives us is the promise and example of the father greeting the prodigal son with joy upon his return. The doctrine of eternal salvation, and predestination, in their expansive definition, are opposed to the essential element of choice given by the creator. If our hearts become cold to God and to his righteousness we will stand in judgment, and our hearts evaluated according to its ending condition not according to how hot our passion for Christ might have burned at some earlier time in our life.

To be carnally minded is death, but spiritually minded is life and peace... if ye live after the flesh ye shall die, but through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the flesh, ye shall live. [Rom. 8: 6-13]

Take heed brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily... lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast until the end. [Heb. 3: 12-14]

Demas has forsaken me having loved this present world. [II John 4: 10] contrast with I John 2: 15-17

Fornication Adultery and Other Fleshly Sins

All these “fleshly” sins result because of the choices we make related to the freedoms and blessings that God gives us in this present world. It would simple if, as with Adam and Eve, God said do not to do this particular thing, or that particular thing, such as eat this “apple”. Yet for so many things, it was not God’s desire for us not to categorically do one activity or another. What God is concerned with is our desire and attitude before the behavior and activities which we do engage in. In fact God did give man this entire world, and he gave man dominion over the world. Part of this world, is the enjoyment and pleasure which we derive from living in it. A man is told to till the ground, but he is also to enjoy the fruits of his labor, to take satisfaction both from the effort he puts into it but also from the bounty itself which his effort brought forth.

Fornication and adultery are sins derived from the context in which the activity is engaged in. Both these sexual sins involve in the enjoyment of the God ordained sexual union outside of its proper context. Marriage is a union ordained by God. It is within this union which sex is to be engaged in. There is no direction given by God regarding what can or can not be done within the marriage sexual relationship of husband and wife. As with so many worldly pleasures, God has given man broad discretion in how, and to what extent, he can engage in them. Yet Man also has the responsibility to keep each liberty within the context of righteousness. Defining this context under the concept of Grace and Believer’s Thoughts Attitudes is be based on our individual conscience; but within that there is the duty to make sure that our heart is itself in a right relationship with God so that our conscience is not hardened, so that we fail to perceive sin when it arises.

As discussed earlier, marriage is one of the three primary areas which God engages in relations with man. The three spheres of relations are the individual, the marriage or family, and lastly government. What sex stands for is the intimate and personal union which God has ordained within a specific context, that of the marriage relationship and that this relationship is intended to exist exclusively between one husband and one wife. Sex is the earthly or fleshly enjoyment open to every person yet is intended to be restricted and contained within its own God ordained and blessed relationship. Relating back again to the three spheres of relations, the Bible says that in sexual immorality, man sins against his own body, which is itself the temple of God. Within the marriage relationship, sexual relations involve two separate individuals who are made one flesh. This stands for the relationship in the spirit which Christ has with the individual believer. We are made one with Christ through his blood. The church itself is called the bride of Christ. An action of government, the relationship of a group of people in the flesh, is also referenced in terms of sexual sin. Israel is on numerous occasions referred to as an adulterous wife, because of their constantly turning away from the commandments of God and serving idols. Worshiping idols is constantly equated with the act of sexual immorality. God draws analogies between his attitude toward sexual sin and Israel forsaking their spiritual relationship with the one true God. The root cause of fornication and adultery is when we seek after our own gratification and self-centeredness, the desire to indulge ourselves without concern for others. Lovers of self

rather than lovers of God. Heb. 13: 4. Spiritually this is related to Israel's idolatry forsaking the worship of God and his commandments and turning to the worship of idols. See Ex. 34: 13-17, Hos. 4: 12-19 Rom. 6: 13 Jer. 3: 1, 6-9, Ezek. 23: 30, II Chron. 21: 13. See also the personal results of pain/jealousy caused by the person who commits adultery in Prov. 6: 32-35.

I made a covenant with mine eyes, why should I look upon a maid? ... Is not destruction to the wicked? And a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity? Doth not he see my ways, and count all my steps? If I have walked in vanity, or if my foot hath hastened to deceit; [Job 31: 1-5]

Howbeit the high places [idolatry] were not taken away; for as yet the people had not prepared their hearts unto the God of their fathers. [II Chron. 20: 33]

... these men have set up their idols in their heart, and have put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face.... [Ezek. 14: 3]

Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.... for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused them to err, and they have gone a whoring from under their God. [Hos. 4: 11-12]

It is that same 'spirit' that is sin unto God. That spirit of pride of self-centeredness or self-gratification to the point our desire is no longer to please God or follow his commandments. If we love God, the way he desires for us to love him, the sin of fornication and adultery will not be as great a hurdle.

God has given us this world to enjoy and the things in this world to enjoy. In and of themselves there is no "sin" in enjoying them. Some of those things are sex; wine; food; and other fleshly recreation. The sin comes in those items enjoyment outside their ordained context or to the extent that they become our personal "god" themselves (we put them before our relationship with God) or they put us in a context that is not pleasing with God (riotous living and fellowship with the ungodly - context where everyone around is lying, swearing, taking joy in sinfulness, etc..). Our first love/commitment must be our relationship with God to the extent that any activity hinders or takes precedent over that relationship, then it becomes sin.

Earthly Pleasure

Food
Sex
Wine
Recreation & Communication
Other Activities

Sin

Gluttony
Fornication/Adultery
Drunkenness & Excess
Riotousness & Forwardness
Coming before our relationship with God

Today when we read the stories of the Old Testament and people making idols of gold and silver, and dancing around them, and praying to them, they appear completely

separate and out of touch with our current enlightened society. What we refuse to understand and to accept is that all these same gods which existed in ancient times still exist today, the only thing that has changed is our understanding and vocabulary we use to describe them. What people worship today is what we put our hope, faith, confidence, and our “love” into. The god’s of today take an innumerable variety of forms; yet they are still just as much gods in people lives as they were back in ancient times. Today they make take the form of money, food, drink, sports, entertainment, and hobbies. Anything which has the effect of separating you from your first love (God) is the spirit of idolatry, which is in God’s eyes the same as the sin of fornication and adultery.

And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in choke the word and it becometh unfruitful. [Mark 4: 19]

Neither be ye idolaters as were some of them... the people sit down to eat and drink, and rose to play... dearly beloved flee from idolatry... ye can not be partakers of the Lord’s table and of the table of devils [fellowship] do we not provoke the Lord to jealousy. [I Cor. 10: 7, 10-14, 21-22]

The Fruits of Unrighteousness Sins of the Spirit Manifest in the Flesh

Even after we become members of the body of Christ, the Church, does not remove from us the right and the responsibility for choice in our lives, attitudes, and actions. Being saved, and our sins forgiven, does not mean that we are not still free moral agents, for better or for worse. Just as we choose to follow Christ, to give our hearts to him, and to submit to his law and will in our lives, we may also choose to remove our lives, attitudes, and actions from under his control. We can love his word, and through our desire to study, and mediate upon his word out of a attitude of love; or we can understand the necessity of the law as our obligation and the necessity of following God's ordinances; or finally we can reject the law of God, and seek after our own desires, and the imaginations of our own mind without care or regard for the law of God.

For this ye know that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God... because of these things came the wrath of God upon children of disobedience. Be ye not partakers with them. For ye were sometimes in darkness, but now ye are light in the Lord, walk as children of light. (For fruit of the Spirit in all goodness, and righteousness and truth) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather reprove them. For it is shame to speak of those things which are done of them in secret... awake thou that sleepeth, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. [Eph. 5: 5-14]

No matter how bright or hot the flame of the love of God and his word may have burned in our heart in the past; it does not mean that same attitude will continue into the future. Jesus tells a parable about five wise and five foolish virgins waiting for the bridegroom to arrive. Five wise virgins kept sufficient oil in their lamps to keep their light burning until the midnight hour when the groom arrived for the wedding. The five foolish did not have sufficient supply of oil and were not able to secure additional oil when it was needed. Nothing stopped the foolish from purchasing sufficient reserve when the stores were open, yet they choose to rely on the limited supply which they had. The consequence of the choice, was that though both groups were in possession of oil in the beginning, the choice of how that resource was managed and conserved, resulted in one group being allowed entrance into the wedding supper, and yet the other being excluded from fellowship.

When the oil of the spirit begins to diminish in our life, then other attitudes and spirits will naturally fill that space in our heart and lives. See Rom. 1: 24-32, Rom. 12: 5, I Cor. 3: 3, I Cor. 6:9-12, Eph. 5: 3-5, II Tim. 3: 1-4. The progression begins with the heart, mind, and attitude, but as with all things in our life, what is in our heart, and

what our imagination is focused upon, will eventually manifest itself in our outward behavior and actions.

The choice will remain with us. Just because we are part of the church does not take us out of this world, or out of the temptations of this world. We can keep ourselves from situations where we are confronted with temptations towards things we know are wrong. Yet we can not totally remove all temptations from life, our flesh will constantly try to reassert its own desires which are pulling us towards self-centeredness, covetousness, pride, lust, which are part of our basic sinful character. Yet the burden for how we deal with these reoccurring desires is upon us. We can cast down ever thought, desire, and imagination which attempts to lead us into sin, or we can ignore it, justify it as just being natural, and even nourish it and tell ourselves as long as we never take any action that the thought or desire itself is not harmful. Some cultures put the entire burden on one group, for example , women to completely cover themselves head to toe so that nothing which would “entice” a man can be seen. Yet this approach alone without an equal demand upon the man to keep his own mind imagination under control is incorrect. More often what this approach does is allows the imagination of the man to be even less disciplined, in that they are able to justify all the duty to keep his lust under control upon the individual they are intent to lust after. Controlling the desire and imagination rests on the person themselves not on another; our minds are our own responsibility first. This does not mean that a person should be able to dress in any way, and then say what you think is your problem and not mine. When you dress in a manner which you know will likely result in, or even desire to cause others to lust after you then you are responsible for your behavior and its affect (at least upon their thoughts and desires if not on their action) upon the other person. The farther we move away from God, and love of him, the more easily we justify sinful attitudes, in placing responsibility upon others for improper attitude we have in our own heart and mind.

... if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.
[Rom. 8: 13]

The law, both after the flesh, and in its highest form the word of God in righteousness points out the sin of the heart, and then judges the actions which come from the person's heart. It is this conviction which the law, both in it's higher and lower forms, brings upon the sinner. The world itself hates the church because it acts as a light to the higher righteousness and exposes the iniquity of society, when the law itself, may not condemn, or even seek to justify it legally. This same conviction and the need for conviction remains within the church, when individual members spiritual walk and attitude open themselves up for sin to arise again in their individual lives. When this same apathy spreads within the church as a body, then as with the corruption of the governmental law which occurs in the flesh, to justify iniquity in society, the worldly church will amend its doctrine to justify iniquity within itself.

They draw nigh that follow after mischief; they are far from the law...
Salvation is far from the wicked; for they seek not thy statutes. [Ps. 119:
150, 153]

Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth... They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly. Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat... For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins; they afflict the just: they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right... seek good and not evil, that ye may live... hate the evil and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate; it maybe that the LORD God of Hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph. [Amos 5: 7-15]

Previously there was a discussion of things which certain members of the body of church may through their individual conscience feel are sins, yet other members may not, and how that each of these parties should address their concern related to the other. Yet there is apparent in scripture certain behavior which is constantly categorized as sin. To the extent that individual members of the body of Christ, or even local church congregations as a body, attempt to disregard or delegitimize the seriousness of these actions it only serves to prove the current status of their heart and lack of sensitivity toward the word of God. Lists of some of the commonly accepted sins manifest in the flesh are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, homosexuality, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, sedations, heresies, envying, murder, drunkenness, raveling, fearful and unbelieving.

... out of the heart of men proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness... all these things come from within defile the man. [Mark 7: 20-23]

Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day, not in rioting, and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof. [Rom. 13: 12-14] see also Gal. 5: 16

The works of the flesh are manifest which are these. Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, sedations, heresies, envying, murder, drunkenness, raveling, and such like, that they which do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God. [Gal. 5: 19-21] see also Eph. 5:5

Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers... whoremongers... [I Tim. 1: 9-10]

... he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For in time past of our life may suffice us to

have wrought the will of the gentiles when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, raveling, banqueting and abominable idolatries. [I Peter 4: 2-3]

But the fearful and unbelieving, the abominable and murder and whoremongers and sorcerers and idolaters and liars shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. [Rev. 21: 8]

All too often when we discuss sin, we are drawn towards the gross and overt sins which we have experienced before we were saved or see through our experience and interaction with the world. The last two sins mentioned above however are not what come to our mind when we usually discuss sin, and especially sin which is cable of separating us eternally from God. These sins are fear and unbelief, and I would also include one other, unforgiveness. Unforgiveness is discussed more under the subjects of Believer's Attitudes and Final Judgment. As you read through the Bible one of the main areas which both Israel leaving Egypt and going towards the Promised Land, and then the new believer within the Church are encouraged in both their experiences was, and still is, not to fear and to believe in God. Israel can trace its failures in serving God and entering into Canaan to its fear and unbelief. Every time, they had a lack of food, when Moses went up into the mountain to speak with God, when the spies brought back their report concerning the Promised Land, in each instance they feared and did not believe the word of God. The result of each of these instances was sin against God and his commandment to his people.

What is it which makes fear and unbelief so unacceptable to God that it is comparable to murder, lying, and idolatry in the eyes of God? It comes back in its most basic and fundamental sense a lack of true and personal love of God. When you love someone and have a personal relationship with them, when you know from prior experience that they are able to accomplish what they say, then you do not fear and there is no unbelief. Your hope, faith, confidence, and assurance is sure upon their promise. Yet when you don't know or have a personal experience with someone, or when your relationship (love) of a person changes, then your attitude and belief will also tend to change. Jesus taught his disciples that they must come unto the kingdom of God as a child unto their parent. The truest expression of love and trust can naturally be found in this relationship. There is no questioning, no fear, for a child they believe their parent can accomplish whatever they are told. This is the heart and spirit which our heavenly Father desires from us. We are given promises, and told to abide in faith. Not in what we see, after the flesh, but after the love of a child which abides in our hearts. As however that loves of God begins to become colder, then fear and unbelief will naturally become stronger and will fill the vacuum in our hearts. Just as with Israel our attitudes and eventually our actions themselves will give expression to fear and unbelief, just as before our actions were based on love and faith upon God's promise.

Fear and unbelief are reflected most prominently in the inability to forgive. The Bible instructs us to forgive one another, and we are told to forgive ourselves. Scripture

shows the purpose of God and specifically Jesus Christ himself was to make a basis for which forgiveness from sins and reconciliation in relationship with God could be accomplished. Christ became our example in love of forgiveness of others for sin. Jesus added to the commandments of love given in the Old Testament law, when he said we should love each other (brothers and sisters in Christ) even as Christ himself loved us. Christ loved us so much that he gave himself for us; this same degree of love is what he requires of us. Without this spirit and heart of love, through a living vibrant relationship with Christ in our own heart, it is almost impossible to forgive others when they have stumbled and fallen, and especially when that failure and sin has directly affected our own life. Without belief in Christ based on personal relationship of love, and his promise that he loves us and will abide with us and keep us in his love, it is almost impossible to forgive someone who has hurt us. Yet if Christ has forgiven the person, through Christ we are likewise commanded to also forgive. As Christ took on the loss and cost of sin of the world upon himself, we through forgiveness are called upon to accept the cost which comes with forgiveness, in forfeiting our own right to judgment against the one who we forgive. We are called upon in faith and love to commit judgment unto Christ himself, and his promise that he will keep us, and that if vengeance is deserved that he himself will provide as sovereign judge both in this world and in eternity. When we do not love Christ, or when our relationship with Jesus is not where it should be, forgiveness is the first area which we remove from the hand of the Lord, and very often the last area which we are able to place again within his sovereign hands.

God's Rebuke Chastisement Working Repentance unto Salvation

Just because we are saved by the grace of God, through the shed blood of Jesus Christ for our sins, and through faith accept Christ as our Lord through the salvation plan set forth through scripture, does not mean that we will continue to walk in the new path. All too often our love of God begins to grow cold and the cares and concerns of this world again take the preeminent place in our heart and mind. The sin from which we were so mightily delivered can begin to bind us again, or some new sin which previously we were not involved with suddenly presents itself to us. All these things work together to separate us again from the saving power of God which upon washing us from our sins, also intends to separate upon himself a peculiar people. When we through our own choice, in our attitudes, and in our actions seek after the world again, and it's sins, then we separate ourselves from the relationship with God, and the covering of his blood which is required for salvation.

It is into this situation which the element of God's chastisement interjects itself into our life. In the previous discussion of Judgment, there were a number of different levels and degrees of judgment set forth in scripture. Chastisement is the form of judgment, which is most directly related to the other two elements of God's character of righteousness but also of grace. When we separate ourselves from God's righteousness, through the choice we make in our attitude and actions then judgment is required. Chastisement is the judgment of God upon sin our life yet with a specific purpose of drawing us back into a proper relationship with him, thus the purpose is grounded upon grace towards us. See Heb. 12: 5-15, Rev. 3: 19

The scriptures equate chastisement to the love which a parent has for their child, when the child does that which is wrong. The parent out of love reproves the child, the example given most is for corporal punishment, to affect a change in the child's behavior and in a more deeper level hopefully in their attitude. Thus the punishment is not for the sake of punishment itself because the child did something improper, but to have an affect of restoring a proper attitude within the child, and between the parent and child. The commandment of God to the Israelites was to teach the law to their children, and to raise them up in the way which they should go. The promise being if the parents would do so then the children when they became older would not depart from the commandments of the Lord. The normal desire of a parent for a child is to have the child display the attitude and behavior which reflects favorably upon the parent. One primary example of this was God's attitude toward the sin of David, and its affect not just upon David himself but its result in how that sin reflected upon God's own prestige because of David's public relationship with God. David's sin gave great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme. See II Sam 12: 14.

. *For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son he loveth. [Prov. 3: 12] He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes. [Prov. 13: 24]*

*Thou shalt also consider in thine heart that as a man chasteneth his son,
so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee. [Duet. 8: 5]*

Even though chastisement is never pleasant or desirable, it is nevertheless absolutely necessary. Without chastisement we are not turned away from our natural desires and attitudes which lead us into even greater sin, thus without chastisement we can not development our character and personality properly. A parent fails to chastise his child because there is no natural strong bond of godly love, which produces the desire to see that child develop and mature in the desired fashion. Scriptures go so far as to equate the failure to chastise as the relationship of a parent with an illegitimate offspring, to whom there is no binding relationship of love. The process of rebuking does not just affect the child but it also affects the parent who in love administers the punishment. Thus without this love, it would be much easier for the parent to ignore behavior and do nothing than to punish the misbehavior when the parent themselves wish they didn't have to. Though the process of rebuking the child hurts the parent themselves yet not as much as what the parent knows that withholding this punishment will eventually cause in the life of that child. Thus the process of chastisement is itself based on love.

... my son despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth he chastiseth, and scourgeth ever son he receiveth. If ye endure chastening God dealeth with you as sons, what son is he whom the father chasten not... are ye bastards and not sons... no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth.. righteousness... lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness spring up... [Heb. 12: 5-15]

I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me. [Ps. 119: 75]

Blessed is the man whom thy chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law. [Ps. 94: 12]

Chastisement like grace is not equally dispensed unto all men. Some people seem to be chastised frequently, others it appears suffer almost no chastisement whatsoever no matter what they do. To many of us, these absences of chastisement sounds like something very desirable if we could manage it in our own lives. Yet the truth is in fact just the opposite. The greatest opportunity a person receives is in fact chastisement. It is through this process that we are given the opportunity to re-evaluate our behavior and our conduct, and in fact to change it in a beneficial manner. Without this process, there is no incentive whatsoever to change the path that our own attitude and desires innately leads us. Furthermore the longer we are allowed to continue in behavior which is unrighteous or destructive to ourselves or to society then it will be so much harder, if possible at all, to change that attitude and behavior in our lives when we try to. More often the result is that over a long period of time that element of our character becomes so ingrained within our personality that it can not be removed; in fact we don't want it removed, which must be present before God can begin to work in a particular area of a person's life. Thus the

lack of chastisement at an early point can serve to separate us from the help and grace of God when that opportunity presents itself later in life.

*Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily,
therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in it to do evil. [Eccl. 8:
11]*

*... when the judge was dead, that they returned and corrupted themselves
more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them... they
ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way. [Judges 2:
19]*

*Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?
Their seed is established in their sight with them... Their houses are safe
from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them... They spend their days in
wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. Therefore they say unto
God. Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What
is the Almighty, that we should serve him? And what profit should we
have, if we pray unto him? ... That the wicked is reserved to the day of
destruction? They shall be brought forth to the day of wrath. [Job 21: 7-
30]*

The worst thing that can ever happen to man (while he still lives) is not ever having to fully face/understand the consequences of his sins. Chastisement is the recognition and understanding of the consequences of sin. Though there is pleasure in sin (for a season) there is a wage (consequence) for sin also. The end result of sin is a broken communion (relationship) with God, broken family relationships, broken health, and finally death (physical and spiritual).

Chastisement is judgment upon unrighteousness brought forth by God upon our flesh; this can include punishment by parents and others in authority and extending finally over to the actions of government itself through the legal system. God uses different mechanisms to bring about chastisement upon people. The mere fact that our behavior may bring us under the judgment of human government and the legal system does not mean that God is not using this as a mechanism to chastise us. Through this process the purpose of government and that of God may not be the same. God's chastisement revolves around changing our attitude which causes us to engage in a certain behavior, yet the purpose of government is focused upon punishment for a specific action itself. There can be continuing consequences to our behavior, and the chastisement which God uses to change our attitude. These outward consequences of chastisement may not disappear from our lives, even after we change the attitude which brought forth the necessity of punishment in our flesh. Through God's mercy and grace, he can also give healing and renewing in the outward life, and the results which chastisement brings in our flesh and in our family and social life. But the fact that some outward consequences may remain is not God's primary concern. What God is focused upon is the change in the heart and mind, and spirit. The fact that outward evidence

remains, can serve the purpose of helping us not to forget where we came from, next it can serve to testify to others of the consequence of God's chastisement to keep them from similar behavior themselves because of our example; and finally it can provide a means which God can use our own experience and chastisement to minister directly unto others, according to God's own will and plan.

Choice is the purpose which God's chastisement brings us to. We can be chastised by God all the day long and yet we can decide that we are not going to change our attitude and our behavior. If God could force us not to want to sin then he would have removed the essential element which he has given to all his higher creation, that being choice. In the most severe example, God's chastisement might cause a person to be in a particular situation where they are in fact incapable of engaging in some particular action or activity; they might be inhibited by fear of punishment for being caught, actually physically incarcerated, or even paralyzed. Yet even in a situation as one of those, the person still has the choice in their attitude, their desire, that if they were just given the opportunity, they still desire to engage in the conduct. It is this attitude which God knows and this choice and desire on the part of the individual which God desires to change, but the choice and desire to change remains with the individual themselves. The nature, duration, and extent of our chastisement is within the sovereign discretion of God, yet the choice of response to the chastisement remains within ourselves.

She [Jerusalem] obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she turned not in the LORD; she drew not near to her God... her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law. The just LORD is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity; every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not, but the unjust know no shame... I punished them, but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings. [Zeph. 3: 2-7]

We should despise not the chastening of God; and not be weary [become stiff-necked] from it. Prov. 3: 11 see also I Cor. 5: 5

There is also a specific type and degree of change related to the choice which we make that God through his chastisement desires to bring forth in our life. When we are punished because of something which we do there are two basic types or responses, or sorrow, which a person can have. One is efficacious in our long-term relationship with God, and the other has no true continuing consequence. The Bible describes these two reactions as being first just sorrow and the second "godly sorrow". Sorrow is the acceptance that we are being punished because of improper behavior and perhaps going so far as to acknowledge improper attitude in our own life. Yet this sorrow is based on the punishment process itself. Godly sorrow is the acknowledgment that we are being punished for specific actions and attitudes in our lives, yet it goes beyond that to awareness that the action and attitudes are in fact wrong, and must be removed from our heart and creates a desire to separate ourselves from them. Sorrow lasts as long as the actual chastisement exists, yet once the chastisement passes the desire still remains for that which itself brought on the punishment. Godly sorrow brings forth the desire for a

new spirit and attitude in the life of the person. It is this godly form of sorrow which is the purpose of God's chastisement.

O LORD rebuke me not in thy wrath; neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore... For mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness... For in thee O LORD do I hope; thou wilt hear, O LORD my God... For I will declare my iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin... Forsake me not O LORD, O my God be not far from me. Make haste to help me, O LORD my salvation. [Ps. 38]

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee and thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight... Behold thou desirest truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop [thy blood] and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice... The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. [Ps. 51]

.... Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for thou art the LORD my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after I was instructed, I smote my thigh; I was ashamed... because I did bear the reproach of my youth. [Jer. 31: 18-19]

I rejoice not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance, for ye were made sorry after a godly manner... for godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation... but sorrow of this world worketh death... ye sorrowed after godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves... what indignation... what zeal... [II Cor. 7:9-11]

Repentance for sin, coming from chastisement, provides the basis for forgiveness and renewal of relationship with God again in righteousness. True repentance is distinct from profession alone. Sorrow alone brings forth an acknowledgment of sin, yet it is repentance which brings a change in the heart and desire to leave the sin which had been binding us. Christ will break the bonds of sin that hold us, but we must let go ourselves from holding on to that same sin. You must truly want to let the sin go or you will return to it. Sins hold on even stronger after you return of your own accord to them. In viewing our struggle with certain sins, we must ask ourselves do those chains hold us or do we really hold on to our chains?

Chastisement must be viewed in terms of its positive purpose within the plan of God for our lives. When we allow chastisement to operate and fulfill its desired result it is to bring us unto true repentance and reconciliation again to God. Chastisement is indeed a form of judgment but it is the redemptive type, it is not to condemnation before the throne Christ sitting as the impartial and eternal judge of all men under the law; rather it is the judgment of a loving father, seeking to bring us back into communion and relationship with him under grace, if we will but submit our hearts unto him in repentance. God seeks to open up our own eyes through his hand in correcting judgment upon his children in this life, so that we can be declared guiltless in the final judgment. If we do harden our heart in this life to God even upon receiving his grace and acknowledging him as Lord, then we as all men will still stand before Christ as judge, if we turn our backs unto him. Yet upon allowing God's hand to work in our lives, he brings us through chastisement to a renewal through his spirit upon our heart, he binds us up together to himself in love. Through chastisement and the breaking which occurs in our heart and lives we are brought into even a closer communion and relationship in the love of God.

Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction; but he that regardeth reproof shall be honored. [Prov. 13: 18]

For if we would judge ourselves [as Christians] we should not be judged but when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world. [I Cor. 11: 31-32]

Or despiseth thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance... not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? [Rom. 2: 4]

Come let us return unto the LORD; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten and he will bind us up. [Hos. 6: 1]

God's Working Through and Testing of His Creation (Their Choices)

God can do all things and his perfect final will/plan shall be accomplished. However God made his creation for a purpose, that his higher creation (man and angels) could reach their highest potential and achievement. He gave Adam a job in Eden to name the animals he also gave him a burden/challenge (a choice) not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. All throughout the Bible we are presented with man (and angels) being faced with situations to resolve and choices to handle. See Josh. 24: 15 and Rev. 3: 20. God wants to see how we respond and those responses are what builds our character and makes us who we are and who God wants us to become (vessels of honor or dishonor). During the process God wants us to call on him; have faith in him; believe in him and to act on that belief. God wants to show himself glorious and faithful to those who love and trust in him. That in the final analysis is what God most desires in our character development.

It is not only man with whom God interacts, though it is true that man is the true focus of God's desire for relationship and communion. God loved man to the degree that he took on the form of flesh and died for our sins that we can find eternal communion as his bride, and heirs of his promise. Yet God has a relationship, desire, and plan for all his creation, particularly his higher creation. He takes glory, honor and joy in his relationship with them, and in how those relationships themselves overlap and interrelate with that of man. It is not only man whose choices God tests, he goes through the same process with Angels as well. Just as we have our own trials, temptations, and chastisement the same exists with Angels. There are vessels of dishonor in God's creation among men, the same status exists among the angels as well. Just as with man, the angels have, are, and will in the end, be separated according to their attitudes, desires, and actions. God takes glory in working within the context of the choices and effects of those choices both of individual man and angels, and how each affects the other. Daniel prayed to God and God heard his prayer immediately, and sent an angel, however Satan and his demons withstood the angel for 3 weeks. Another angel (Michael) was sent to help, and the angel was able to complete his task. See Dan. 10: 12-14, 20-21, see also Jude 1: 6, 9. God could have immediately sent the answer to Daniel's prayer, yet he sent a specific angel to bring an answer, even though he knew the opposition that the angel would face. Neither did God give that angel immediate assistance in accomplishing his mission. Therefore both Daniel and the angel were tested; Daniel having to wait upon the answer and the angel struggling to fulfill the direction of God despite serious opposition. Yet in the appointed time, God sent help and deliverance for that angel, through the efforts of still another angel, Michael. Thereby through this one episode in scripture the faithfulness, and character of all these different groups (Daniel and the various angels involved) were all developed through testing according to the will and purpose of the Lord.

God's perfect will is accomplished. However within the context of specific individuals and their choices and the effects thereof certain things that are not God's

desire do happen [Adam's sin; Israel rebellion against God; Angels giving up their first estate] but God still realizes his perfect final objective even within the self-imposed context of his individual creation's own choices. God receives the greatest fulfillment with the achievement of his perfect will/plan through the efforts of his creation seeking, serving and loving him of their own free will and choice. See Heb. 11, also Rev. 2: 4-5, see also, II Peter 1: 10, II Peter 3: 17-18, II Tim. 3: 1-4, and Heb. 10: 35-39.

“If a man have a hundred sheep and one of them go astray, doth he not leave the ninety-nine and goeth into the mountains and seek that which is gone astray? And [IF] so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more for that sheep, than of the ninety-nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.” [Mat. 18: 11-14] We need to understand that it is the sheep's decision to go astray from the flock (whether due to carelessness, indifference, or willful decision). God in his love, compassion, and tender mercies will seek after his sheep. But still the sheep must desire to be found and answer back when he hears the shepherd's call, even if it is just to cry out. Not ever sheep will return or be found. Though it is not God's (permissive) will that any should perish, the fact is that because returning is based on our decision to return not just on God's in seeking for us to bring us back again, that some lost sheep will never be found.

(... today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts as in the provocation in the day of temptation in the wilderness, when your fathers tempted me... forty years.. I was grieved... they do always err in their heart, and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath they shall not enter into my rest.) Take heed brethren, lest there be any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily... lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers with Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end... so we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. [Heb. 3: 7-19]

There is no way for a child to grow, to mature, and to expand their individual talents, skills, and strengths which they possess unless and until they are given the opportunity to develop them. This process comes through the experiences of life. It comes through trials and challenges, it requires the experience and developing the determination to stand up when we are first learning to walk and even if we stumble and even if we fall, to get up again until we achieve the goal which is before us. Not giving up. Yet sometimes we need to change direction, or decide that something is not best for us, thus even in failure we still develop character and knowledge of ourselves, and putting our faith and trust in God in determining what choices to make. Our process for how we make choices and the direction we take in our life is in the end our own. God, through Christ, constantly calls us and beckons us to come unto him, to bind ourselves in love and faith unto him, to follow him. Yet the path we take lies first in our own hands and in the choices we make, whether we do follow Christ or if we turn aside.

Ye did run well, who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?
[Gal. 5: 7]

Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not. [Gal. 6: 9]

Demas has forsaken me having loved this present world. [II John 4: 10] I
John 2: 15-17

Tribulation/Trials

Tribulation and trials are another step along the process by which God prepares for himself a peculiar people, separated to himself, through love and faith. Every day we each make decisions and choices which influence in small ways the development of our character and personality. Tribulations and trials however relate to the major challenges in our lives which we have to face; if we could we would turn aside and go another way. These situations are not like the discussion of Chastisement. Chastisement is brought upon us because of some sin, or behavior which is unacceptable in our lives in the eyes of God. Thus the purpose of chastisement is correction of error. The difficulty with trials and tribulation is that they occur when there is not necessarily any error present in our life. Outwardly the trial comes without any clearly evident or understandable justification.

It is the discussion of tribulation and trials which many people use this as the argument against the existence of God. They say that if there were a God, how could he, or why would he, allow the innocent or good people to suffer? We discussed this idea earlier in the general discussion of Faith. In short, it is not for us to place ourselves in the position of God. We tend to sit around and look at a situation and say, there is no way that I as God would allow a certain situation to exist, or allow a particular person to go through a circumstance. This entire argument is based on the premise that we are able to exercise the degree of judgment and knowledge which God himself possess. It further says that our own judgment is equal to that of God himself. In the broadest sense, the Bible makes clear that all things are created by God, that all things exist in him, and that all things (including ourselves) are created for God's plan, purpose and finally for his pleasure. According to this standard alone, God's own sovereignty and judgment alone is the binding standard and not our own for what God can bring forth in the lives and relations of mankind as his creation. God is not obliged to justify himself to his creation, no matter how we may imagine our position in the grand scheme of creation, the fact remains we are in fact one part of the total of creation, and are not the Creator himself.

The Bible does give explanation for what the purpose is behind the experiences of trials and tribulations. The over arching purpose is that there is an objective which God desires to accomplish in the lives of his people or in showing forth his righteousness to the world in general. Does it seem right that the good man should suffer just that God should be shown to be righteous to the lost world, or that the good should die, just that judgment of God would be shown more righteous upon the wicked? Perhaps not in our eyes. For most of us, this is not a price which we would be willing to pay or to ask of another. Yet God will be justified, and the way which he paves to show forth his glory and honor unto the world can be a hard path, yet it is itself a path which God will not put before us which he is not willing to follow himself.

Jesus Christ, as the Word made flesh, is the most prominent example of God's willingness to allow his creation to undergo tribulation on a personal level. We have

already discussed under the various aspects and functions of Christ that he served a continuing and edifying purpose of reconciling sinful man to a Holy God. Yet, on the most basic and human level, Christ lived, he breathed, he labored, he loved those around him. Based on the humanity of Christ, there is no basis upon which God would seem to be justified in bringing the trial and suffering which Christ had to undergo leading up to the cross. Regardless of how good and caring the life of Christ had been up to that point as a man, a son, a friend, and as a teacher, God did not move back or take away the cross which stood in his path. The Bible is also clear when it describes the agony of Christ in the garden when he prayed and asked three times that if it be possible that the cup of suffering which is set before him according to the plan of God could be removed. Even while he made this prayer, the stress upon him was so great that he sweated as it were drops of blood, yet during all this time he continued to say not his will but the will of his Father be accomplished. The Bible says that as the incarnate God, Christ had the authority to call for angels who would have delivered him from the cross even as he hung on it. Despite this authority and the suffering of the flesh Christ endured until the end, even as it had been appointed for him.

Along with the purpose of God in grace accomplished in the suffering of Christ, there was another lesser known purpose which the trial of Christ accomplished. It was a turning of seasons, at the death of Christ on the cross, we moved from a dispensation of law unto grace, from the primacy of the flesh under the law to the spirit, but he also moved the focus of God's dealing with mankind from centered upon Israel as a nation to the church and gentile believers. Since the death of Christ on the cross, for the most part, the spiritual eyes of Israel have been blinded concerning the role and purpose of Christ, as the messiah. God's basis for this blinding of the spiritual eyes of Israel is based on the people rejecting Christ as their king. As we will discuss in greater detail later, Final Tribulation of the Church, this coming time of trial for the church, as the continuing body of Christ in this world, will accomplish the turning again of God unto the nation of Israel, and their reconciliation with Christ as their messiah and king. Thus, Christ becomes our example and hope in times of tribulation, both as individual saints, and as to the church in general.

These things have I 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. [John 16: 33]

Along with the trial and tribulation we have certain promises which God himself gives to us in the process of trial and tribulation. God has a perfect plan for his chosen people, both individually and as a group binding us to himself through the trials which we experience. Previously we had discussed Fruits of the Spirit at that point we stated that being joined unto Christ through the process of salvation created the situation through which these various fruits could begin to grow and develop in our lives. The issue remained how, that these various fruits would grow and develop to their fullest within the will of God for our lives, and which also become the basis for what we will bring forward and develop in our eternal relationship and development with Christ. The traditional methods set forth for this development is thought of in terms of prayer, fasting, keeping a

heart of meditation and love of God and his word. All these elements are indeed essential. These elements can be thought of as the basic watering, sowing, and tilling process. What tribulation causes is the drought, the storm, the testing which causes the trees and plants which bring forth the fruit to become stronger through the trying process. When the times of testing come then we are forced to focus upon and strengthen the fruits which are within us, in order just to survive. The normal tendency in our lives is to become satisfied and complacent, during times of trying we are forced to test the roots of our relationship with God, either the roots grow deeper and stronger or the entire plant is in danger of being plucked up and tossed into the fire.

... we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; patience experience; experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed love of God is shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. [Rom. 5: 3-5]

Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven... the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which can not be shaken [our faith] may remain. Wherefore we receive a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably... For our God is a consuming fire. [Heb. 12: 26-29]

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator. [I Peter 4: 19] see also I Peter 4:12-14

The trying process is also equated in scripture most often to a purifying process through fire. Tribulation removes the spiritual excess baggage which we can develop over time, the rust from lukewarmness, the dross of self-sufficiency and complacency. All of these are removed by the purifying and cleansing aspect of tribulation. As already mentioned the body of Christ, his church, is called to be separate from the world, not to be reconciled with it. The church of Laodicia in Revelation is most often equated with the church before the return of the Lord in glory, and it is this church which is challenged to purchase from the Lord gold tried by fire. God will have a pure bride, not polluted by the world in attitude. We are justified by the sacrifice of Christ, and not by our own works or righteousness, yet this does not mean that God will not allow persecution to arise, or trials to occur, which refine us according to God's purpose. Sometimes certain development of character and attitude only arise through the fire of trials; yet God promises that he will not put more upon us, than what through Christ's spirit living within us in grace gives us strength to bear. It is this grace working in conjunction with our personal determination to stand in the face of the trial, in love and faith, which develops the purity in heart which God is seeking to accomplish.

That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried by fire, might be found unto praise and honor

and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ... receiving the end of your faith even the salvation of your souls. [I Peter 1: 7-9]

The words of the LORD are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. [Ps. 12: 6] The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold, but the LORD trieth the hearts. [Prov. 17: 3]

Another purpose of what we go through during the process of trials and even persecution is to use us, to support others who themselves may face similar situations and circumstance. As part of the body of Christ, we are charged to support and edify one another in love. To bear one another's burden. Once we have gone through a particular tribulation in our personal lives, we are called upon lift up other members of the body in their time of need. This can be manifest through encouragement in time of despair, a shoulder to lean upon, or a prayer of intercession. God works through us, ministering to others, just as Christ through his spirit may have supported us in our time of trouble. It is within God discretion how he works in each particular circumstance. Who knows you may have gone through your own trial just for the purpose of supporting your brother or sister when they go their own. All too often when a person is going through a time of trial in their personal life, those around them even in the body of Christ view the person as a sinner experiencing the chastisement of God for some undeclared sin, much like Job, In fact what the person is facing is of a time of testing to bring that person to a deeper richer relationship with God. It is the brother and sister who themselves knows of this difference, through their own personal experience, who can offer the love and support which is needed in that particular circumstance.

This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope, It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning, great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him,. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD. [Lam. 3: 21-26]

... the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. [II Cor. 1: 3-4]

Not only can trials and persecution work for the purpose of changing our heart, spirit, and attitude, but it can actually occur according to the will of God to change our physical condition. God glories in taking what man intends for evil; either attitudes, desires, and actions which may appear as destructive; yet upon giving ourselves into God's hands, and having faith in him and his preserving hand can allow God to use us from a position which we never would have occupied without the tribulation occurring. Without Joseph's brothers despising him because of his dreams, and selling him into captivity; God would not have been able to make him a ruler in Egypt and delivering his family years later during a time of famine. Ester took her life into her own hands coming

before the king unannounced allowed the Jew's to be saved from persecution by Haman. The early persecution by Paul of the Christians resulted in their dispersion farther away into gentile territories, bringing the truth of the gospel of Christ to regions which had never heard the word. This situation again points to the shortcoming of man attempting to substitute our own judgment for what a righteous God would allow as concerning suffering and tribulation because we can not see or understand all the effects and ramification of any particular action. Further we can not know what might have occurred had some situation not occurred, regardless of how bad some situation might appear on its face; who can say if something even worse may have been avoided.

For this thing, I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me, And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness... therefore I will take pleasure in my infirmities... [II Cor. 12: 8-10] see related discussion [Temptations](#).

For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed; and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? [[Ester 4: 14](#)]

Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshiped. And said, naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name fo the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly. [[Job 1: 20-22](#)]

It is through this trying and testing in our lives which has the desired result of binding us closer to God. When all the things which we put our hope and confidence in, through our normal everyday lives, are taken away we are forced to lean and rely upon God and his grace and strength not on ourselves. Once the trial and tribulation has subsided, once the storm of life has ceased, we have a new understanding and appreciation of just where our trust and confidence lies. We are thus given a new vantage point of what is important in life. Thus it is a result of this testing that we now have the experience to go into new depths of understanding with our Lord and Savior. David when he went out to face Goliath, did not just step out and grab up a slingshot on the spur of the moment. When he gave up Saul's sword and spear, he took up something which to those without knowledge of David's background appeared complete foolishness. But those same scoffers did not know that David had faith in God's ability to use that same sling based on his prior experience with the lion and the bear. David merely took that same basis of experience in God's delivering hand and applied it to the giant. God can and will use this same principle in our own relationship and faith in him based on experience in the fire, both to keep us safe and to give us the victory.

... I will never leave thee or forsake thee... The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. [[Heb. 13: 5-6](#)]

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed, we are perplexed but not in despair; Persecuted but not forsaken, cast down but not destroyed... for our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. [II Cor. 4: 8-17]

Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not. I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me... O thou that saveth by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee from those that rise up against them. Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me under the shadow of thy wings. [Ps. 17: 5-8]

For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock. Now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me; therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD. Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me. [Ps. 27: 5-7]

Being used of God is normally understood to be a good thing. Within the context of trials, tribulation and persecution this is not necessarily the case. Those people who are instruments bringing persecution and trials intentionally upon the children of God are primary examples of this fact. See further discussion Vessels of Dishonor under the discussion of Grace. God can and does allow the wicked and the sinner to persecute his children for any variety of purposes, each of which is for the eventual betterment of the saint themselves and even to minister and later benefit those around them. Yet the fact that God brings forth honey out of the rib of the lion does not mean that the source from which the eventual blessing may flow is itself accepted or approved of God. To the contrary, the Bible is clear that those who persecute his children, or harm one of the least of them, it is better that a millstone were placed on their neck and tossed in the middle of the sea. Thus the Bible focuses the child of God to commit their heart to a faithful Father in the midst of the trial and the persecution which may come from others, and not to focus upon anger or revenge for any wrong committed against them. Rather we are commanded to commit judgment unto God our heavenly Father and advocate who will not forget what is done to any one of us, even if we are benefited by development in our walk with God, or even the entire world may reap the rewards of that person's or government's own persecution. Judas' betrayal began the process of grace extended to all men through the cross, yet Judas never found grace and instead hung himself on a tree. God takes pride in standing up for his children in the face of tribulation, and will in his own time bring forth judgment and tribulation upon the persecutors themselves by his own hand.

... thou shalt know that I am the LORD, for they shall not be ashamed that wait on me... for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children... all flesh shall know that I the LORD am thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob. [Isa. 49: 23-26]

... your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure, which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer. Seeing it is righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation on them that trouble you. [II Thes. 1: 4-6]

The LORD judge between me and thee [David and Saul], and the LORD avenge me of thee, but mine hand shall not be upon thee... The LORD therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand. [I Sam. 24: 12, 15]

And blessed be thy advice... which has kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand. [I Sam. 25: 33] ... about ten days after that the LORD smote Nabal, and he died. And when David heard... he said, Blessed be the LORD that hath plead the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and hath kept his servant from evil; for the LORD hath returned the wickedness of Nabal upon his own head. [I Sam. 25: 38-39]

Lord's Prayer Lead Us Not Into Temptation (Be Careful What You Ask For)

Previously we have focused upon chastisement, trials, tribulations, and persecutions relating to their effect upon the life of the child of God. Each of these areas are primarily negative in nature to the extent that each of these areas involve the individual being subjected to a situation which if possible under the circumstances we would prefer to remove ourselves. Temptations fall into a different category. Temptation involves being confronted with a situation or circumstance or choice which we in fact want to make however it is focused upon our self-centeredness and gratification of oneself instead of a love of God or of our neighbor.

When Jesus was teaching his disciples how to pray he referenced the subject of temptation. The instruction he gave was that we should ask our heavenly Father to lead us not into temptation, and to deliver us from evil. See Mat. 5: 9-15. It is within God's discretion the type, manner, duration, and circumstance of how we are tempted. With chastisement, trials, and judgment, the Bible encourages the Christian to accept each of these circumstances willingly because there is a greater benefit eventually to be derived from successfully concluding these times in our lives. Temptation does not have the same positive benefits generally attached therewith, besides the fact alone that we refuse to submit to the desires of our flesh and our mind. Temptations and withstanding them serve only to document that our attitude and actions we take are right in the sight of God.

... count it all joy when ye fall into diverse temptations, knowing this the trying of your faith worketh patience. [James 1: 2-3] Blessed is the man who endure temptation for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life.. to them who love him... [James 1:12]

Temptation is also much more subtle and nuanced than any of the other types of testing we have discussed. Some types of temptation are clear and blatant that everyone would easily and commonly understand, such as being faced with a opportunity to openly engage in some action which is clearly sinful. Yet temptation often arises in areas which only the person themselves knows involves some action or conduct is sinful, in that it offends the person's own conscience, or leads the person down a path which they know if they continue to follow it will end in sin. Two people can be faced with the same situation and the same choice and make the same decision. For one person it would constitute a failure in giving in to a temptation, for another person it would never even cross their mind that any potential problem exists, and in fact for that person no moral problem was present. See discussion of Believer Thought and Attitudes.

The danger of temptation arises from the fact that it plays into the weakest areas of each of our individual lives. The other problem is that it is possible that when we ask for something from God which we desire perhaps for completely proper motives and reason at the time, but would itself affect us in a manner which we don't understand. Sometimes without even knowing the thing which we desire most may in the end produce

sin and lead us eventually to failure toward God. Take for example the saint which is constantly wishing they could win the sweepstakes (assume for sake of discussion that isn't sinful itself) and even asking God to let them win. God may keep them from in fact winning, and not answer their prayer. The reason God could do this is because he knows what the true final effect of winning that contest would have on that person's life. The saint might intend to give a large amount to the church, support missions, and to help the less fortunate; yet that large amount of money might develop a grip on their heart, attitude, and behavior which the person themselves doesn't know. God keeping back the person from receiving what they feel that they desire, even for the noblest of motives at the time, in reality God keeps that person from falling into a temptation to sin. What we are called upon even when it appears that God is ignoring or refusing to answer our prayer, is to accept that God loves us and will meet our needs according to his perfect will and plan for us.

Sometimes God's grace in assisting us in avoiding a particular temptation may take the form of an actual trial in our lives. The Lord may take something away from us, or put some new burden upon us, and we can not understand why. It may be that this burden which bears down upon us has the simultaneous affect of suppressing some aspect of our lives, or heart, which without the presence of the burden would raise up in our life a temptation which, just as with the example of winning the lottery could lead to the failure of our walk with God. The nature of blessings which we receive can have an affect upon our personality and attitude which can be detrimental to our character, or it might allow some other small defect in our character which was not significant or noticeable previously to suddenly become much more pronounced. It is the kindness of God when he keeps us from temptation, even when it means laying an additional burden upon us in love and grace.

Lest I [Paul] should be exalted above measure through the abundance of revelation, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh... to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure... I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. [II Cor. 12: 7-9] When Paul mentions being "exalted above measure" it is not clear whether he means by others or by himself (in his own spirit) either way the end result would have been sin (idolatry or pride or both).

We are still inclined often to say in our own mind to God, give me what I desire and I will handle the temptation which your blessings bring. In response to this attitude the Bible gives us a number of examples to evaluate. The two most prominent are Satan and Judas. Satan in the description of his outward appearance, his physical and mental abilities, and his social status within the kingdom of heaven (before the fall) are all to be desired. He is described as a cherubim, an angel of light, he was in charge of the singers in heaven, he is described as full of wisdom, and that he walked in the midst of the fire in the very mountain of God. See Ezek. 28: 12-19 also II Cor. 11: 14. Yet the Bible also says that he was full of pride and that in his heart he was a murderer from the beginning. Why did an omniscient God give Satan such an abundance of blessings,

position, and power while at the same time he had the type of nature and personality which he possessed? The reason is that it simply pleased God in his sovereign authority as creator to do so. God knew that the blessings which Satan received, in conjunction with the character and nature which God also gave him would produce a certain result and the related actions all of which are accomplished. Yet the fact remains that God knowing the end result, and setting Satan in the path which he did, merely made the choices, which were Satan's own, the more easy to make. What would have been the case if Satan were never to have received all the blessings which he did, yet still had the same basic personality and character. Who knows the answer to that question, all we know is how God through his sovereign will and grace did decide to deal with Satan and the effects it had. Judas is a similar example in the flesh as Satan is in the spirit. Judas is said to be a thief from the beginning. Jesus knew this fact when he selected Judas to be a disciple. Not only did Jesus bring him into his inner circle he gave Judas the money bag to administer. Judas was probably more than willing to make himself available for the position, but Jesus could have taken that temptation out of his hands, but he did not. Just as with Satan, Judas was not denied anything which he desired, even when the effects and end result of those decisions were known by Christ at the time. Both these examples, should serve to make us aware of the importance to pray and ask the Lord to please lead us not into temptation, even if at the same time the path appears very attractive.

God himself does not tempt us, but does allow us to be tempted, "... by our own lusts we are enticed..." "See James 1: 3-4. God does set and establish our paths.. place us in situations to be tempted. The results of those temptations (our actions) serve as basis for God's final judgment according to his standard of righteousness, see discussion Judgment

When we do fall into temptation we still have hope and confidence that through Christ we can overcome. Sometimes temptation, and even failure, serves the purpose of awakening our heart that we must draw back closer to Christ, and that we have slowly drifted away from where we should be. The essential element of failure in temptation relates to the call back unto true repentance and renewing of our individual walk with God. Repentance as understood in the discussion of Chastisement is true godly sorrow. This is the type of sorrow which brings about a change in attitude and behavior. Sorrow alone, yet finding yourself seeking out the same temptation and the same sin again, is not repentance. What you truly have is merely the dog that of his own desire constantly comes back to his own vomit. Christ can and will deliver from temptation, but only when we truly submit ourselves unto him; but we can not continue to cling to the sin with one hand, and claim to reach for Jesus with the other. Temptation begins first in the mind, the heart, the attitude, and victory over temptation must similarly begin with the heart, and mind. The love of God and hiding the word in our heart gives us the power to withstand temptation when it arises. What we spend our time meditating upon when the temptation is not present will be what will control our decision and either deliver us, and allow us to flee from the situation; or call us again to give ourselves over to it when the temptation comes.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. When he had fasted... he was afterward hungered, and when the tempter came to him, he said, if thou be the son of God, command these stones be made bread... [Jesus] said it is written [word of God used to rebuke Satan]... Satan took him up... said it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee [appeal to pride]... [Jesus said] it is written, thou shalt not tempt the LORD thy God... devil.. Showed him all the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them... if thou wilt fall down and worship me [offering glory; earthly power; materialism - appeal to the flesh] ... [Jesus said] get thee behind me Satan, thou shalt worship the LORD thy God.. Him only... [Mat 4: 1-10]

For in that he [Christ] himself hath suffered being tempted he is able to succor them that are tempted. [Heb. 2: 18]

There is no temptation taken you but such as is common to man, but God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it... flee from idolatry... [I Cor. 10: 13-14]

Money, Money, Money

Today depending on whom you listen to and which philosophical camp you align yourself with, there are basically two diametrically opposed views related to money and wealth. One says that money is the root of all evil, and that anyone sincerely committed to God must themselves hate money and completely separate themselves from this world, and its materialism to which money is at the forefront. This was the popular seventies left-wing Christian-Marxist approach. The second currently more in vogue view says that God naturally blesses those who love them and who submit themselves with a right spirit unto him. Many sermons focus upon the aspect that you give faithfully to God and in return God will richly bless you materially in your own life. Money thus become the measure by which many seek to prove their righteousness in the sight of God. However what the Bible teaches regarding money proves that though as with so many things in scripture there are elements of truth in each approach; standing on their own, each view is a misapplication of what scripture itself teaches related to money and riches in general.

“Money” is a medium of exchange. Money, as a specific item itself, is dependent on time, place and circumstance. Money only has the value that the people you are engaged in a transaction with agree to. How much influence does Confederate Dollars or Mexican Pesos have to you (knowing their value)? Thus money is a mechanism used to secure other material items. We use money to buy a house, a car, food, wine, a feast, even “power” and “influence”. For this reason money is only an inanimate object, like a hammer, a plow, or a gun. What gives money its character is the attitude and desires of the person who utilize it.

The “Love of Money” is not necessarily the love for the physical item “money” rather it is the love or desire for the items things that the money can secure for you (thus this present material world). The love for this present world (our carnal selves - sin/lust) is constantly at war with the desire for, and commitment to, God’s eternal kingdom (righteousness) and his will for our lives. See the Parable of the Sower and the thorny ground. The seed among the thorns is the person that hears the truth and the cares of this world, deceitfulness of riches choke the word of God, and he becomes unfruitful. See Mat. 13: 22. God desires for us to love him and to put our hope and faith in him to meet our every need. We are instructed to look at the flowers in the field and their beauty and how God clothes them. They are given as our example and God calls upon us to love and trust in him, and put our faith in him to meet our everyday need. Putting our faith in money, thus works to exhibit that our desire is really after this world and not after the kingdom of God. As the scripture makes abundantly clear all so often a man can not serve two masters, God and the world at the same time, he will love one and hate the other. The deceitfulness of riches is rightly associated with cares of this world and lusts of other things as that which chokes the word, and makes us unfruitful in that our cares; our emphasis is on ourselves and this world not on God, seeking after him. See Mark 4: 19.

*A feast made for laughter, wine maketh merry, money answereth all...
[Eccl. 10:19] Wealth maketh many friends, but the poor is separated
from his neighbor. [Prov. 19: 4]*

*... Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that
when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitation. He that is
faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much, and the that is unjust
in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in
the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust true riches? If ye
have not be faithful in that which is another man's who shall give you that
which is your own. No man can serve two masters, for either he will hat
the one and love the other... Ye cannot serve God and mammon [the
world]. [Luke 16: 9-13]*

Scripture makes reference to the king of Tyrus [as symbol of Satan] for how material physical, social, intellectual blessings together do not themselves make perfect in the sight of God. In fact any one of those things, and especially a number of them in combination in our lives, if our heart, mind, attitude is not correct will lead to pride and lifting up and trying to make ourselves God. Glorifying our own selves our own accomplishments and what we have, rather than giving thanks unto the LORD who in fact provided these blessings by his goodness. All those outward and intellectual blessings will not hide or compensate for a corrupt heart or attitude in the sight of God. Here are some of the attributes given unto Satan, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty, every precious stone was your covering, you are the appointed cherub, you walked upon the holy mountain of God, and walked up and down in the midst of the stone of fire, you were perfect in thy ways from the day you were created, until iniquity was found in you. By the multitude of your blessings they have filled the midst of you with violence. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty. See Ezek. 28: 12-19.

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. God doesn't hate the rich he merely knows the affect materialism can have on the heart and attitude. Our tendency to put our faith and confidence in ourselves (materialism) and not God. To trust in riches and not in God. See Mat. 19: 21-26 and Mark 10: 23-24. People tend to want to justify themselves in their material prosperity as indication that they are viewed as righteous before God, just as many people through their good works hope to prove themselves righteous before God himself. Both approaches in comparison to the God's own standard of true righteousness fall short, because each bases their justification upon their own works and not upon God through Christ.

*... say unto the prince fo Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord GOD, because thine
heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God...
Yet thou art a man and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of
God. Behold thou art wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can
hide from thee; With thy wisdom and with thine understanding thou hast
gotten thee riches... By thy great wisdom and by thy traffic hast thou*

increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches; ... Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God. Behold I will bring strangers upon thee.. They shall defile thy brightness... Wilt thou yet say before him that slayeth thee, I am God? But thou shalt be a man and no God... [Ezek. 28: 2-9]

Today a number of preachers point towards the worldly blessings “guaranteed” to those who love God and are walking in his will. The problem with this approach is that not every person will be blessed in the same way, in the same manner, or at the same time. The Bible does make mention in terms of giving that if you give out of a willing heart, that you will receive again shaken together and running over. Doctrine which pushes a person to serve God just for the sake of what we will receive in money and other worldly benefits is shortchanging the individual who is called unto God. For one thing not every person will become rich in this present world upon accepting Christ and living for him. When you predicate your relationship with God based on what you have and what you accumulate in this world, you in fact are building your relationship with God upon the sand of this world, instead of on the rock of the love of Christ.

Abraham was called a friend of God because he walked in faith not by sight, and his desire was upon a heavenly city. Limiting the measure of God’s acceptance to material blessings in this world, is to turn our backs to the greater, more significant, and more lasting blessings. The rewards of God include his mercy and grace towards us in protecting us and our loved ones and family both in a spiritual and physical sense. Many times we are not even aware of the grace and protection of God shown unto us in these areas in this life. Moreover the true rewards of God are eternal in nature, the crown and the robe of white, being called to the wedding supper of Christ and his bride, our mansion and communion with Christ in heaven, and partaking of the tree of life in the New Jerusalem, these are the lasting rewards which have true and lasting consequence. Part of our freedom of choice, is that we can have as expansive or as limited relationship with Christ as we ourselves allow. Christ will always open the door to deeper relationship if we will just knock. Yet if we are content to just stand at the door and accept blessings in this present world, Christ will not force us to come in further against our will. Just as two tribes of the children of Israel never elected to receive their inheritance in the Promised Land, but rather desired to reside on the wilderness side of Jordan. Many people will accept a relationship with Christ much less than what Christ himself desires for them, and the nature and extent of the eternal blessings which are available to one person will stand unclaimed and instead will be distributed to others. See a further discussion of Rewards in Heaven.

The final analysis of money is that it is like any other type of blessing which God has within his sovereign will and discretion regarding its distribution. The fact we have much or if we have just enough to get by upon, both groups must in the end be bound together in one hope and one assurance that is Christ Jesus. To those who have money, just as with any type of blessing bestowed by God we are to utilize it liberally to the support of those around us. If a brother is in need we should stand in the love of Christ and be willing to minister in love, even as Christ himself loved us. It is when our

decision is controlled by the money that we chose to withhold our blessings from a brother or sister in need that money then becomes our god, and becomes sin. We are given blessings and various enjoyments in life. How we enjoy them, and our choice to lift up our personal pleasure above God or our brothers and sisters in Christ, leads us to exceed the God ordained limit and can result in temptation and ultimately if we take no action to idolatry in our heart.

Corruption of the Word of God [Unpardonable Sin?]

Many people constantly wonder in their heart, am I beyond the salvation grace of God? Have I sinned to the extent that reconciliation between me and God is impossible? Because I have sinned and backslidden so many times am I beyond God's grace being further extended to me? As we have previously discussed under Grace, the nature extent and duration of grace is within the particular bounds God has set for each person individually. Yet the scripture makes clear that within the context of specific actions which will cause God to withdraw his hand of mercy towards each person equally is a very limited circumstance, yet it does exist.

The "unpardonable" sin, in scripture is referenced as "blasphemy against the Holy Ghost". The question remains what is this sin referring to, and how is it committed, and what is it about this sin, which makes it of a nature and character which God is justified in not forgiving for the fact of its very commission?

... the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall NOT be forgiven unto men... whosoever speaking against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world or in the world to come. [Mat. 12: 31-32] The Pharisees had just accused Christ's miracles of being derived from the power of Satan. See Mark 3: 22-30. Mat. 9: 34.

The term of blasphemy in its commonly understood usage and meaning, refers to the disrespectful use of the name of deity. One of the Ten Commandments given to Moses stated not to take the name of the LORD thy God in vain. However, the scope of the unpardonable sin is different than that of this specific injunction. Blasphemy relates to the cheapening of a particular item, a corrupting of it in the eyes of others by taking steps to intentionally change the thing in relation to the essence of its nature, character, and purpose. Satan throughout the Bible is constantly lying and trying to deceive using God's word. From the Garden of Eden, to the temptation of Christ, to the Beast and False Prophet of Revelation all these are examples to defilement of God's word and will, with the intent to lead people away from God.

The item which is being corrupted through blasphemy is the Holy Ghost itself. The next question becomes exactly what is this Holy Ghost which the scripture is referring to in this context. Is it the gift of the Holy Ghost which is promised to live in the lives of each member of the body of Christ, and as evidenced through the speaking in tongues? In at least, a general sense the answer to this question is no, even though in particular context and circumstance it could in fact qualify. What is meant by the Holy Ghost is the greater reference to the Word of God and its essential purpose and character in righteousness as working within the world and the lives of man.

The seriousness associated with the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is primarily associated with who it is that commits this sin, and upon the effect which this sin has on others around that person. Not every person can commit this sin. A person

who has never known God and received the light of the truth of the gospel can not be capable of committing this sin. Much like the obligation imposed for forgiveness, the unpardonable sin, is imposed on those who have a special knowledge and relation to the Word of God.

Reading the context, within scripture, in which Jesus mentions the “unpardonable” sin, he is addressing his statement to the religious leaders themselves attempting to discredit his ministry and power. Their purpose was to cause doubt in the hearts of the people who were being drawn to Jesus’ message. Viewed under fleshly traditional evaluation of the circumstances many people say that this is really nothing out of the ordinary itself within the course of human relations. Jesus’ ministry was posing a challenge to the political power and authority of the established leadership, and their actions were taken merely in response to protecting their own position. Within the normal course of human events and especially political relations this is entirely understandable. However, evaluation in this manner merely is a continuation of the same error which Israel committed and justified the judgment of God. All this type of analysis does is emphasize again the fact that those who espouse this political position have their own eyes and hearts closed to the purpose and message of Christ, and what he stood for in this world.

The people who attempted to discredit and bring reproach upon Christ, and the basis upon which his miracles were predicated, were the religious (not the political per se) leadership of the day. It is constantly the Pharisees and the Scribes which are the most ardent opponents of Christ and his works. The scribes and Pharisees due to their background, knowledge and training in scriptures were most aware of the nature of Christ’s works and the miracles which he performed; they did not deny the power of his works, and they knew the scriptures better than anyone that his teachings were in accordance with the higher meaning and purpose of the Old Testament law. From the time he was a child and left in the temple by accident for three days, the doctors of the law at that time already marveled at his knowledge of the law. Yet upon witnessing Christ’s works, and listening to the doctrine which he taught, they decided that instead of accepting it, that it was in their own interest to attempt to discredit Jesus’ works and miracles and in so doing also to discredit the message of righteousness which he was attempting to bring forth in the hearts of the people. Instead of giving glory to God they attempted to attribute the same works unto Satan.

The second element which made their actions so serious in the sight of God as sin, was because of the position which they held in society, the authority and respect which the people in general held for the religious leadership. These individuals claimed for themselves a special privilege and knowledge relating to the law and righteousness. They were the examples which the ordinary person of the day looked to for guidance in questions of religious nature, and in understanding righteousness. For this reason, their attacks upon Jesus were not attacks upon Jesus personally between themselves as individuals. Their reason for their accusations toward Christ was to weaken and destroy the belief of the common people in Israel and to turn them away from his message. It never was the works which were of true importance but rather the words which he

brought, the works merely served to acknowledge the power of God working through Jesus. Challenging the basis of Christ's works was to make his words and teaching of no effect upon the hearers. Just an average publican or some other sinner, throwing dispersions upon the works of Christ would not have had any serious consequence on another person who was trying to determine for themselves the significance of Christ's message. Yet a religious leader making a similar dispersion would shake the faith and confidence much more of the same individual as they were making their decision.

The priest and the prophet prophesy lies and the people willingly receive and follow the lies. Even the people still know and ask after the truth though to them the (true) word of the Lord is considered a "burden". Jer. 23: 33-40. To this people God says he will forsake them, forget them, and bring upon them an everlasting reproach and perpetual shame.

Corrupting the word of God is corrupting the very righteousness of God. His eternal judgment is upon anyone who attempts to make the commandment of God of none effect, or making it a stumbling block to those seeking after him. The most blatant example is to ascribe the works of the Holy Ghost to the devil. See Rom. 1: 25, also Isa. 5: 20-23, Isa. 29: 10-14. In our previous discussion of Righteousness and in our discussion of the methodologies through which God revealed himself it is evident that one of the essential revelations of God comes through the Word and the law is one of the direct reflections of the Word. Finally Christ himself is described as the Word made flesh and dwelt among us. The process of intentionally corrupting and attempting to change the Word (the law) is documented throughout the Bible. Jesus says that the law of divorce was given by Moses because of the hardness of the people's heart in desiring a method of getting a divorce. This alteration in the law from God's perfect will, was not a product of Moses own self-will to change the law, but rather a reflection of the people's own self-will and hardness of their heart to following the perfect word of God.

The Bible is clear regarding God's attitude and judgment upon those who out of their own self-centeredness and hardness of their own heart treat the things of God without the respect the righteousness of God deserves. The sons of Eli, the priest, abused their position as priests themselves; they did not respect the sacrifices of the Lord, and committed adultery with the women who came to the temple. The Bible says that they caused people to abhor God because of their conduct. For that reason God determined that they would die in a particular way at a particular time. No opportunity was extended to them to seek forgiveness; no change in their spirit occurred which caused them to desire to repent (which is a part of God's ultimate judgment itself). The man who was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath, God commanded that he should be stoned. The reason why he was judged so harshly was because of the lack regard for the Word of God (the law); there was no expediency in his action in gathering sticks on the Sabbath, no emergency or necessity requiring the gathering of the sticks, rather only self-will. One final example in the Old Testament revolved around the return of the Ark of the Covenant which had been captured by the Philistines. After a number of plagues upon the Philistines they sent the ark back to Israel. But upon its return the Israelites themselves did not treat the Ark with the reverence which its holy nature required, rather

a large number looked within (not just upon) the Ark. Because of the people's lack of reverence for Ark and what it represents, the righteousness and holiness of God, he sent a plague upon those who had looked inside the Ark and killed thousands.

All these examples in the Old Testament, point towards the seriousness which God holds to the holiness and righteousness of his Word. Yet these examples do not meet the level of the unpardonable sin (except for the sons of Eli perhaps). The reason for the unpardonable nature of the blasphemy is threefold. First, it is based on a spirit of self-will and indifference to the true holiness and righteousness of God (see preceding examples). As with the Scribes and Pharisees those whose hearts are turned cold through sin, must at one point have experienced the truth, or be knowledgeable of what the truth is in fact and after having known it to have turned away. Second, it corrupts the word of God; it attempts to turn righteousness into unrighteousness; and it attempts to call darkness light; in order to justify their sins by claiming God's acceptance. Finally, through the process of corrupting the law, and the righteousness of God, it desires to cause others to believe a lie and lead those searching for truth, in sincerity, to a lie, and ultimately resulting in the damnation of their souls. Christ stated anyone who harms one of these little ones it is better for a millstone to be put around that person's neck and thrown into the sea. [Mat. 18: 6-7] The term "little ones" can be applied to the babes in Christ. Anyone who would deceive them or harm their relationship with God through false doctrine or teachings is in danger of committing the unpardonable sin.

Doctrine, Traditions, Legalism/Formalism and Apostasy

Today doctrine is generally regarded as a destructive element in religion. Many say if there was not this disagreement between various denomination, sects, and groups as to what the “truth” is that is to guide and direct our walk and relationship with God, the church could make a more compelling case to the lost. To the extent that doctrine becomes a barrier to reaching the lost, and to the promotion of the gospel, the cause can be traced back to the formulation and application of doctrine in a spirit of self-will and self-righteousness instead of in a spirit of Christ. See discussion of Believer’s Thoughts and Attitudes. For others the argument regarding “doctrine” is just used as an excuse to justify themselves not being willing to submit their own lives to the law of Christ. The argument against the necessity of doctrine is used by those who because of the same spirit of self-will which motivates one group to self-righteousness, is used by another group who through coldness in their own heart, and callousness in their conscience wish to disregard doctrine as to allow any sin or immorality yet still claim Christ as their justifier.

Doctrine is the process of giving guidance to the process of following the basic commandments, and understanding of who God is, and what he requires and desires from those who love and seek after him. The first step before discussing doctrine must be the truth upon which doctrine stands and develops. What is the principles which underpin the word of God? The Old Testament sets forth the foundational truth upon which, the later revelations of scripture, elaborate upon. The first truth is this, Hear O’ Israel the LORD our God is One.

The focus of Doctrine: (1) Love God with all your heart, mind and strength; and (2) Love thy neighbor as thyself. These are the two great commandments on which all the rest of the law is based. Hear ‘O Israel the LORD our God is One LORD [the First of all commandments]. [Mark 12: 29-31] see I Tim. 4: 13-16, Isa. 29: 24; Duet. 6: 4-5; Duet. 10: 12.

The purpose of doctrine should be to strengthen us in maximizing these two principles in our individual lives, based on the understanding of who God is. When we are striving toward righteousness/holiness in our lives, God is our joy then there will be no place in our lives for the things which defile to take root. All scripture and the development of history itself, especially as recorded in the Bible, serves the role of demonstrating the will of God for righteousness, judgment, and grace in our lives.

The foundation of N.T. doctrine is salvation by grace, through faith that Christ died for our sins, and is risen again. Through the process of salvation (repentance, baptism in Jesus name, and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost) we take on Christ. See Acts 2: 28 and Gal. 6: 16-20. Upon receiving Christ through salvation we are made new creatures, and are called to mortify the deeds of the flesh, and to let the works and fruits of righteousness have effect in our hearts and lives through Christ living in us.

Beyond the foundational truth and doctrine set forth in scripture, summarized above, the permutations of how best to apply these truths in our everyday lives begin to diverge in application and principle. This is not to say doctrine is or should be the subject of whim or not be undertaken with the utmost in prayer, fasting, and meditation. Just because there may be different equally valid application of doctrines, each regardless of their individual approaches will reach the same conclusion on certain issues. Specifically as deals with the basic sins both of the flesh and of the spirit (i.e., fornication, murder, lying, covetousness, envying, lust, strife, fear, and idolatry just to name a few). Where the variation will be most evident will involve what is termed by Paul, and discussed earlier, as “doubtful things”.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, by the same standard all sound doctrine is similarly the product of God’s will and revelation. The interpretation and understanding of the same scripture vary from individuals and from churches, the same principle applies to doctrine. From the earliest days of the church’s development there have been changes and developments in doctrine, especially between the Jewish and gentile Christians. The earliest and most prominent issue involved circumcision and what activities and conduct standards should be imposed upon the gentile believers. The apostles after meeting with Paul set forth a list of conduct expected including, abstain from pollution of idols, from fornications, from things strangled, from blood. See Acts 15:20. Much of these requirements were carried forward from the Jewish law itself, both from the Ten Commandments (regarding adultery) but also from the general Jewish law prohibiting anything strangled, and anything relating to or touching of idols. Each of these factors was of utmost importance in Jewish religious life. Paul himself did not place an equal emphasis upon issues relating to dietary issues, though he did place as much importance on the avoidance of immorality as the Apostles themselves. This serves as an example of how doctrine even within the early church began to vary; yet on the fundamental issues of sin, specifically moral sin, both remained in agreement.

Whatsoever things from without [outside] entereth into man cannot defile him... that which cometh out of a man defile him... out of the heart proceed evil thoughts... all these defile the man. [Mark 7: 18-23]

Wherefor if ye be dead with Christ, from the rudiments of the world... are ye subject to ordinances. (Touch not, taste not, handle not; which all are to perish with the using) after the commandments and doctrines of men [which things are] will worship... neglecting of the body, not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh. [Col. 2: 20-23] see also Lev. 10: 1.

New Testament doctrine acknowledges the fact that the relationship and revelation of God to man, through Christ Jesus, took us out from under the teaching of the law after the flesh, and moved the law into a living vibrant relationship in the heart and soul of the individual believer, based on this fact that Jesus in his teaching, indicated that the purpose of the law was not focused upon the outward but upon the heart. Jesus did not rebuke his disciples for picking corn to eat on the Sabbath, or not washing their

hands before eating. If the heart was clean the condition of the hands themselves were not important, while at the same time if the hand were completely clean yet the heart was defiled, then the entire person was filthy in the eyes of God. Upon receiving salvation and becoming a new creature in Christ there will be a natural change to the outward man even as the inward man is made new. See discussion of Faith in Action.

Many people attempt to redefine sexual and moral sins in this context, to claim they affect only the body, and that they can still have a heart acceptable to God, yet the nature of sexual sins, is fundamentally different than merely being sanitary. As discussed earlier under Fornication, sins of a sexual nature touch upon greater moral issues and the context in which sexual sins occur relate to wider teaching regarding God and his chosen people. See discussion of Fornication.

Doctrine is developed over time by man's judgment (guided by the Spirit) based on the law/commandments of God given to men, beginning in O.T. times and revealed through Jesus' teaching/example. The church as a body is responsible for maintaining and respecting the form of doctrine which is given unto it. Doctrine, like the law or word of God itself, imposes special responsibilities upon the hearers. God throughout scripture constantly admonishes not to turn to the right hand or to the left from the commandments which we receive from God, and from church leaders. The reason for the warning given to Israel relating to the law, applies equally today to members of the church body. Israel was led away from the law unto idolatry as their relationship and love of God and the law became cold, thus more and more error crept in until finally Israel found themselves in the midst of idolatry (see the book of Judges) while still professing to serve the same God who took them out of Egypt. The same danger lies within the members of the church, and the church body itself, as we move further from God's word, and toward worldliness, we will tend to embrace false doctrine which allows us to do what our flesh desires yet still justify ourselves as right before God through Christ. The day to day attitude and walk of the church and its members is the product of the doctrine which it has received. For just this purpose, the burden of teaching, and enforcing issues of sound doctrine must lie with the church leadership, with the elders, and deacons, and ultimately with the Pastor. The Pastor stands responsible for the sheep under his care, and for his particular ministry given to him by God. Finally in the judgment, the church and its members will stand responsible for how they maintained the integrity of, and applied the doctrine received within our own life and within the local church.

Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom. A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself. [Prov. 18: 1-2]

... to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants are ye to whom ye obey, whether sin unto death, or obedience unto righteousness. God be thanked, that ye were servants of sin but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered to you. [Rom 6: 16-17]
see also Col. 2: 8-23

Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed rightly dividing the word of truth. See II Tim. 2: 15. God places the burden on us to seek after him, study his word, pray, fast, seek his face that we may be able to discern his truth and separate out righteousness from false doctrine. We must separate out the doctrine and wisdom of man leading to error and iniquity from truth and the simplicity of the doctrine of Christ. Doctrine is subject to dilution and corruption just as the law itself is. Satan himself is constantly attempting to corrupt doctrine, and sinful man is constantly lead consciously and sometimes subconsciously to base doctrine on any number of principles which lead to greater and greater error over time. Each error in doctrine begets further error, as the center and focus slowly changes and becomes obscured over time and surrounding circumstances, eventually only upon retrospect is it possible to see how far away from the original basis the departure has been, that is assuming anyone still remains who is able or willing to acknowledge the fact. See related discussion of Unpardonable Sin,

I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name... they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart, which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbor... the prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? Saith the LORD. Is not my word like a fire? ... I am against the prophets saith the LORD that steal my words every one from his neighbor... and cause my people to err by their lies... [Jer. 23: 25-32] For I have not sent them saith the LORD, yet they prophesy a lie in my name; that I might drive you out, and that I might drive you out, and that ye might perish, ye, and the prophets that prophesy unto you. [Jer. 27: 15]

The first and most prevalent basis for the weakening of doctrine comes from man himself. The challenge to doctrine comes from the fact that sound principles come from the same outward spring from which corrupt waters can flow, which is man himself. Thus we are challenged to test the doctrine against the word of God itself, in the scripture. Second we should evaluate the fruit which is manifest coming forth from the person who espouses a particular form of doctrine. The final area for evaluating teachings is to listen to the spirit of Christ which resides within each of us as members of the body of Christ. Jesus says that his sheep, those called by him will recognize his voice. With any new doctrine we are called give attention to the moving of the spirit of Christ within our own hearts, which can warn us against false doctrine and preserve us in the truth.

I fear lest by any means as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted, from the simplicity that is in Christ... such are false apostles, deceitful workers transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ... Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. [II Cor. 11: 3-15] see also Gal. 1: 7-8

Man as the basis for doctrinal error has existed from the Garden of Eden, and continued through the tablets of stone given to Israel even until today. The reason for why this error is so persistent and prevalent is also not a mystery. It springs from the pride and self-will of man, being lovers of self rather than lovers of God. Doctrine based on man's own wisdom comes from man's belief that his understanding of the way which things should be is the right way. Man constantly believes he is doing God a favor by helping to straighten out the little errors which appears God has made in the law, and the revealed word of God. When we substitute our own judgment for that of God we are making ourselves God, and seeking to glorify and exalt ourselves instead of the Creator. When the law and word of God made man uncomfortable, man merely attempted to change the law itself, instead of changing themselves and their sinful behavior. It was out of this fog of formality, and man's regulations which over time consumed and encrusted the true spirit and purpose of the Old Testament law, from which Christ burst forth renewing and exalting again the righteousness of the law.

But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they have swallowed up wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision and stumble in judgment... Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from milk... for precept must be upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; for with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.. This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing; yet they would not hear. But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept... that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken... I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment will I also lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet... For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it; and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it. [Isa. 28: 7-20]

Legalism, philosophy, and even intellectualism all are variations on the same theme of self-will, pride, and self-justification as a basis for proving our righteousness to those around us and ultimately to God himself. Just as legalism was a problem in the time of Christ so it is still today. The law was used to justify the killing of the prophets and finally Christ himself, yet at the same time to cover up the wickedness of those same men through excuses and subterfuge. Legalism in its basest form does nothing constructive, it does not promote true righteousness, and rather it is used to promote private purposes and agendas for the wealthy. All through the Old Testament the law was to promote the equal standing of the widow, the fatherless, and the stranger before the judgment seat. The law [itself] is the expression of God's righteousness in that it is intended to promote equality, justice, and righteousness in the conduct of affairs between men of both high and low estates; and provides for an atmosphere of peace where each man can live righteously before God. The law itself in its righteousness becomes one of the basic forms of God declaring himself to creation through government, to the Jew and

gentile alike. Legalism serves to hold up the facade of advancing the high principles of the law, yet in actual application it provided a basis for the undermining of the rights of the widows and fatherless and poor. Legalism fails to seek after the knowledge of righteousness which must itself underpin the law; it is instead satisfied with mere outward formality. The same effect occurs in matters of doctrine as it does in the secular world. In both spheres the effects are equally destructive. Legalism (lawyers) alone will never justify it merely exalts the outward man and seeks to excuse and justify man and hinders those truly seeking after righteousness.

... ye lawyers lade men with burdens grievous to be born, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers... ye bear witness that ye allow [justify] the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed [the prophets] and ye build their sepulchers. [Luke 11: 46-48] Ye [lawyers] have taken away the key of knowledge; ye enter not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hinder. [Luke 11: 52]

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. [Prov. 14: 12]

Philosophy, and intellectualism, serves a similarly destructive role in relation to doctrine as legalism. Where legalism is focused on the rights and responsibilities of society, philosophy and intellectualism is focused first upon the individual themselves and ultimately reaches outward to the relationship between individuals and finally to society as a whole [at which point it can be argued it becomes legalism]. The danger of philosophy and pure intellectualism as applied to Christian doctrine is that it is based and predicated upon human reason and not the revealed will of God. The knowledge of God surpasses and goes beyond human reason and attempting to reconcile the ways of God with human understanding tend to lead to irreconcilable differences. This is the reason that God bases our justification in his eyes first of all upon a heart of faith. We are called to leave what we see and know and accept him, based on his call to our hearts in childlike simplicity. The pomp and circumstance fashioned by men both in the outward show of formality or in the rituals and detailed rationales and justifications replace the simplicity in action and attitude of love first to Christ and then to our brothers and sisters in Christ. The further we are pressed inwardly unto self-reflection and contemplation the further we are removed from the spirit of Christ which is calling us outward in love.

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit after traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. [Col. 2: 8]

Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels.. Vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind. And not holding the head which all the body by joints and bonds having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. [Col. 2: 18-19]

But shun profane and vain babblings, for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word doth eat as a canker.. Who concerning the truth have erred, saying the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his. And let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. [II Tim. 2: 16-19]

... High-minded... Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof; from such turn away. For this sort are they which creep into houses and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts. Ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. [II Tim. 3: 4-7]

Today many people seek to equate religion with some diametric opposition to intellectualism. According to many, the fact that one is religious must necessarily exclude them from true intellectual pursuit. The difference is the basis upon which the intellectual pursuit of the Christian originates. To the world, the pursuit of knowledge begins with the world and ends with the world; anything which purports to extend beyond those terms must necessarily be rejected as unprovable. See discussion of Faith earlier. The Bible is clear that we are made in the image of God, who himself created the heaven and the earth and all that is therein. The pursuit of knowledge is a desirable characteristic. Scripture is replete with exhortations to seek after wisdom, to seek for knowledge and understanding. The issue becomes what result this searching and eventual finding has in our own lives. Does it produce a greater appreciation and love of God in our lives, through understanding his majesty in his creation and the discoveries which he reveals to us, or does it instead produce pride in our own intelligence and a spirit of self-reliance where we give glory to the fact discovered or to the knowledge revealed instead of to the God who created all which we discover? Before its secularization the foundation of western intellectualism was based on the church, which is the engine from which modern western inquiry came from. The end result of intellectualism without a basis upon God is intellectual idolatry, and just as with religious idolatry, God gives over the proponents to darkening of their understanding in the areas which they put their trust and pride. Their knowledge becomes limited and myopic which according to God's sovereign will leads the proponents themselves into greater error, and brings judgment upon them in the areas which the proponents themselves base their strongest confidence. See the discussion of Saints in the Tribulation for how the secular intellectual tenants of specifically the western world will be shown for their futility and hypocrisy.

Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth, like dross; therefore I love thy testimonies... It is time for thee, LORD, to work; for they have made void thy law. [Ps. 119: 120, 126]

The question remains what is it that allows error in doctrine to multiply to an extent that eventually apostasy results? The answer is that it is the heart and attitude of the individual believer who themselves are turned away from a love of God in their hearts

and minds, and that attitude which slowly spreads through the whole church body which gives rise to apostasy in its most obvious form. This goes back to our first basic discussion regarding the attitude toward the Word of God. It is the condition of man's heart when the law of God has gone from a love, and cooled to the point of being viewed as a duty; until finally it is nothing more than a burden when corruption of doctrine into a state of apostasy occurs. Instead of acknowledging man as made in the image of God and that we must maintain our hearts and attitudes in a spirit of righteousness with God's spirit; man instead desires to create God in his own image, and seeks to alter the law of God to justify our own conduct in our own minds. The law is changed from being a schoolmaster and teacher, to being a comforter and justifier of our own unrighteousness.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables. [II Tim. 4: 3-4]

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light; and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight... which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him! Therefore as fire devoureth the stubble... because they have cast away: the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. [Isa. 5: 20-24]

... they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them; for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. [Ezek. 33: 31]

The final and most spiritually terminal stage of this condition is when the pastors, and other leaders of the church, embrace the concepts of apostasy which arise. Instead of standing for the truth of the gospel, they use their position and lead their congregations into acceptance of the false doctrines which arise. When this happens then following generations are led into judgment without even the knowledge of the decision between truth and error being given to them to decide for themselves. Just as with families and nations, discussed further under Grace: Vessels of Dishonor, the choices made in terms of doctrine leading to apostasy becomes succeeding generations' own burden.

Behold the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD... they shall run to and fro and seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it. [Amos 8: 11-12]

Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for time to come for ever and ever; that this rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD. Which say to the seers, see not; and to the prophets, prophesy not unto us right things,

Speak unto us smooth things. Prophecy deceits; get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us. Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, because ye despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon; Therefore this iniquity shall be unto you as a breach ready to fall... whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant. And he shall break as the breaking of the potter's vessel! That is broken in pieces; he shall not spare... [Isa. 30: 8-14]

Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD and he delighteth in them; or, where is the God of judgment. [Malachi 2: 17]

The burden of sound doctrine rests on each believer, on each church, and upon each generation. The temptation of error in doctrine and apostasy must be constantly addressed and guarded against. The world is constantly seeking to conform the Christian to its image and its standard of morality, and to turn our attention and love from Christ our Savior and our Hope. It is the holy spirit of Christ dwelling in our hearts which sustains us and keeps us; and it is our faith based in love which keeps us sealed unto God. What we rest upon is the knowledge that if we seek after Christ, and search after his truth for our lives, in the form of sound doctrine, he will reveal himself unto us, and keep us in his revealed truth. We are called to apply the truth of God in our lives, not through vain profession alone, but in action applying the principles we have been taught, both in loving God and our brothers and sisters in Christ, and finally following wherever he leads.

But be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves... he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. [James 1: 22-25]

Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them that draw back to perdition; but of those who believe to the saving of the soul. [Heb. 10: 38-39]

We henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by sleight of men and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive. [Eph. 4: 14] see also Philip. 3: 18-19, I Tim. 4: 1-7, I Tim. 6: 3-5, II Tim. 3: 5, II Tim. 4: 3-4

Role of the Saints (Church) During the Tribulation (and Beyond)

Earlier we discussed the nature and purpose of tribulation within the life of the individual believer and the church. I have separated out the discussion of the believer and the church within the context of the (Great) Tribulation for distinct treatment. Tribulation serves a similar purpose whether it occurs in smaller scales in each individuals lives, or in larger context of specific government's persecution of church congregations within its borders, or ultimately within the context of the final tribulation itself. The Bible gives much greater emphasis upon this time of special persecution and tribulation on the part of the church and believers than in any other context. The reason for this emphasis throughout scripture in the Old Testament and New goes beyond the mere fact that people throughout history are always curious about the end of human history, and how it will occur. Without doubt the Bible gives a number of different viewpoints of events which will happen within the context of these last times. The challenge is to attempt to try and understand events which are yet to happen. Interpreting prophecies already past never seem all that difficult in retrospect; the challenge comes when the discussion is prospective in nature. Many individuals have spent many years studying the subject of the end of times, and many have differing interpretations on various subjects. The one thing which we can agree upon is that no man knows the day or the hour of the Lord's return. With that limitation in mind, my discussion is focused on how this final time of tribulation works within the overall context of the revelation of the nature and purpose of God as has developed up until this time, and how this revelation will be further expanded upon through this Great Tribulation experience.

This section will not focus upon giving a specific chronology of sequence of events, attempting to name people or nations involved in the end-time prophecies, or trying to explain what specific events various prophecies are attempting to describe. Given that disclaimer, I will now proceed and to some limited extent violate it. The first area involves when the church will be raptured (taken out of the world by the return of Christ in glory), I believe this will occur in the midst of the tribulation. Second I believe that prior to the rapture that the church and its members will be the subject of physical persecution within the context of the overall world political system(s).

All these are beginning of sorrows... they shall deliver you up to be afflicted; and shall kill you; and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. Many shall be offended, and shall betray one another and hate one another. [Mat. 24: 8-10] Iniquity shall abound love of many shall wax cold. [Mat. 24: 12]

.... the same horn [Beast] made war with the saints and prevailed against them... he shall speak great words against the most High and shall wear out the saints of the Most High and think to change times and laws; [the saints] shall be given into his hands [for 3 ½ years]. [Dan. 7: 21, 25] [Rev. 13: 7] [Dan. 12: 10]

... for that day [rapture/second coming] shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed... [II Thes. 2: 3]

... I saw under the alter the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for their testimony which they held... white robes were given them... [God] said rest for a little while... til their fellow servants brethren that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled. [Rev. 6: 9-11]

Compare with the beginning of Rev. 15.

I beheld a great multitude, no man could number of all nations... clothed in white robes... these are they come out of great tribulation have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. [Rev. 7: 9-17]
[Rev. 2: 13] [Rev. 3: 8-10] [Rev. 13: 7]

The church within the context of the final tribulation brings together a number of different subjects, which we have discussed in relative isolation up to this point. All throughout the scripture the plan and purpose of God has been shown through various stages and degrees in revelation and progression according to God's own sovereign will. The tribulation of the church itself marks one of these watershed turning points. As we discussed and as scriptures continually proclaim, for all things there is a season with God. What we are called upon is to take advantage of the season which we are in. There are seasons of grace and of judgment; of the spirit and of the flesh; of faith and of law. There is a time of sifting and of separating; there is a time of separating the wheat from the tares. Let both (wheat and tares) grow together until the harvest gather together the tares to burn; gather the wheat into my barn See Mat. 13: 30. See also shallow ground; offended upon persecution and tribulation. The method of distinguishing and separating wheat and tares is by a process falling away first, those who hold fast to the faith (sealed) are the wheat and will be gathered to God.

Our earlier discussion of Doctrine/Tradition and Apostasy reflected the progression of error from sound biblical doctrine to finally apostasy. The reason for how this deterioration occurs points back to the heart of the individual believer and the church, as they approach the issue of directing our individual walk with God and how we relate with the world around us. Reading through scripture, especially the later scripture (the final books of the Bible before Revelation) the subject becomes more and more focused on keeping false doctrine from invading the church body, and from keeping the church distinct in its nature and character from the world. If the salt loses its savor what good is it? A number of different early churches are addressed in scripture. Paul addressed his own Epistles to a number of them, and the book of Revelation itself makes reference to seven of these early churches. Revelation went on to ascribe to the various churches various distinct personalities, with both strengths and weaknesses. The final church listed is the church of Laodicia, this church is generally believed to represent the church present at the time of the great tribulation and at the time of return of Christ in glory.

The church of Laodicia is described as lukewarm in its general attitude towards doctrine and towards the world. To God a spirit of lukewarmness is worse than even being cold to things of God. At least a person who hates the church, and the things of God, knows where they stand and has the ability (perhaps) to analyze that position if things get bad enough and to change. With a heart which is lukewarm the person still holds to the profession and even the belief in their heart that they are still part of the church, yet at the same time they have no separation from the world and the attitudes and desires of the world. One of the reasons for this attitude which the Laodician church had was because of the material blessings which it enjoyed. See also I Cor. 10: 7-22. There is nothing wrong in itself with possessing material goods and other enjoyments of life, the problem comes with the importance that those things and the pleasure associated with them occupy in the believer's life. The church in this circumstance moves to where its first love is the world, and Christ becomes secondary in their heart and his law and the condemnation it can produce is nullified through legalism and concentration upon ritual instead of the true righteousness of the law.

And take heed to yourselves lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with... drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day upon you unawares. For as a snare it shall come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore and pray always that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all those things that shall come to pass and to stand before the Son of man. [Luke 21: 34-36]

During this time of doctrinal apostasy and materialism within the church there will also be overt signs of spiritual manifestations which themselves will adopt and support the form of false doctrine. These signs and manifestations will become the outward works which the world and the church will use to justify their own doctrine in their own eyes and heart as being proper and accepted because of the miraculous works which they will see. Many people will know that the teachings which they hear are opposed to the doctrine which their parents taught them, yet because of the "miracles" which they will see, and the great words which they will hear, those same people will accept the works and the new doctrine as truth and follow them. Continuing in the faith, and walking in righteousness even as the world and the outward manifestations of spiritual power are all pointing in an opposite direction will be a form of testing and separating out of God's own people. God decides how he will separate out those who love the Lord and are called unto himself by grace through faith. This spiritual testing will be one of the most fundamental testing of the church as a body itself.

If there arise among you a prophet or dreamer.. And giveth thee a sign or a wonder. And the sign or the wonder come to pass... [he says unto you] let us go after other gods; which thou hast not known, and let us follow them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet... for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and will all your soul. [Deut. 13: 1-3]

But in his estate shall he honor the God of forces; and a god whom his fathers knew not shall he honor with gold and silver... Thus shall he do in the most strong holds with a strange god whom he shall acknowledge and increase with glory; and he shall cause them to rule over many, and shall divide the land for spoil. [Dan. 11: 37-38]

[The] Dragon gave him his power and great authority. They worshiped the beast saying, who is like him... There was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and power was given to continue... Blasphemed against God and his temple. Given him power to make war with the saints and to overcome them. All that dwell in the earth shall worship him whose names are not written in the book of life. [Rev. 13: 3-10].

Faith as discussed in depth previously is based on a spirit and attitude of love and continuing in a certain way despite what the outward environment and the direction those around us may try to influence us towards. One of the things the great tribulation will accomplish will be a complete testing of the faith of the church itself, and that of the individual saint, and most expansively of each and every person. It is during this tribulation that each person will be faced with a choice. Normally the choices and testing which we have are principally private and personal in nature, and not apparent to many besides those close to us. The time of the tribulation will be unique in that it is one of those unique points in time where all people will be forced to make a similar choice and decision. The true church, the false church, and the unbelieving world will all have a similar choice to make. All mankind will face the choice of whether to accept the Antichrist and to worship him, and accept his mark or whether to refuse and to accept the consequences of that choice as well. According to the rationale and understanding of this world only one choice will be logical. To refuse to follow the conditions of obedience set forth by the antichrist will mean at a minimum exclusion from the economic system, and eventually it will mean physical persecution and even death. The only reason for not complying will be the teaching which the believer has received in their life and the spirit of Christ dwelling in their individual heart calling them to a hope and promise which is beyond this world and the understanding of this world. Like Abraham the Christian believer will have their hope in a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God.

The church entering into the tribulation will be faced with an attitude of coldness in the spirit and attitude which draws many parallels to the spirit and attitude of Israel at the time of the birth of Christ. The Word of God, especially as displayed through the law, was becoming choked off because of the attitude of the people of Israel. The law, and the Word itself, never loses its righteousness or its efficaciousness. The Word of God itself never loses its power and strength within itself. What does happen is the hardening of the hearts of the hearers and recipients of the word. As discussed earlier the Word only bears fruit within the heart and life of the hearer. It is the hearer who is the ground, whether that ground is hard and rocky, whether it is shallow, or covered with weeds and thorns, or if it is good and fertile ground. The seed itself is the same in every

instance, it is perfect and powerful. The law, like the Word, is itself also perfect and righteous, bringing light and life to the person who is themselves capable of receiving it. The law at the birth of Christ was in danger of becoming corrupted and weakened in its application in the lives of the ordinary Jew. The Pharisees and the lawyers had reduced the righteousness of the law to mere outward formality and ritual; instead of righteousness in heart and attitude and finally behavior. Not every Jew had lost sight of the true purpose and application of the law in righteousness, yet for the vast majority of the people because of the atmosphere of the society and the deterioration of the religious establishment at the time of Christ they were receiving only a shell or shadow of what their forefathers had received from God through Moses. Without the birth of Christ, and the ministry of John the Baptist preparing the way for him, the power and truth of the law, could have been corrupted through false teaching so that the Jews receiving the fullness of the law would have become nothing more than the legalism and understanding of the law which the gentiles themselves had received and practiced.

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God, and if it first begin at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God. [I Peter 4: 17]

Christ's life, his teaching, and finally his death served to take away all the layers of formality, ritualism, and legalism which had over time separated man from the Word of God. The well from which living water sprang which had become stagnant and clogged was again opened to minister again to the heart of man. John and then Christ pointed back to the intent and purpose of the Old Testament law. Obedience was better than sacrifice and a heart that loved God and his neighbor was the fulfillment of the commandments of the law; not ritualism and formality yet having a heart of pride and hate and lust toward their neighbor. Christ in his life supported the Law of Moses; Christ in his death made it possible for the law to be written on the hearts of men themselves. However, the same gradual process which happened to the Law of Moses however began to emerge in the church through its own tradition, legalism, and finally false doctrine. The same spirit and attitude emerged and found expression within the church, because the love of God and his word, slowly became a duty, and ultimately a burden. At the time of the tribulation the Word of God will once again be in danger, without some dynamic change, of again being corrupted in the hearts of man to nothing more than some dead dogma and form without the life changing and directing force of righteousness which is its purpose. The times of this tribulation for the church and for its individual believers will serve the purpose of purging and refining their hearts and turning them back to the fundamental truth and purpose of the law and gospel of Jesus Christ. All the accumulation of worldliness and religious facades which in fact oppose the righteousness of Christ will be taken away through trials and persecution. Each man's heart and soul will be thereby tested and refined by the priorities which must be set, and the choices which must be made and abided by. The product which Christ intends is to make it possible that in the middle of the darkness brought forth by tribulation that the same light which shined in darkness when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us will shine again in its true righteousness manifest through trials to a world in similar darkness.

Throughout this trying and refining of the hearts of believers, the love and grace of God will not be withdrawn. Like the three Hebrew children who refused to bow to the image constructed by Nebuchadnezzar, they were not saved from the trial of the fire, yet God was with them through the process of the fire until they came out again. Grace is the keeping and sustaining hand of God through the trials, keeping our hearts and souls within his hands of love. Grace does not mean we will not fail, but it does mean that a way of repentance and reconciliation will be made for us. Through the tribulation his children will each feel abandoned, yet when we call upon Christ he will hear our prayer and give us the strength to abide even until the end. Grace does not mean there will not be tears and will not be sorrow, yet what we do receive is the promise of God's love that he will wipe every tear from our eye and that he will never leave us or forsake us. The working and faithfulness of God's grace to those who love him is most apparently exhibited by Christ's relationship with Peter during the darkest time of Christ's own trial. Christ had taught on numerous occasions, relating to the final tribulation that whosoever will deny the Son, the same individual the Son will deny before the Father. Yet Christ himself knew that Peter would deny him in the darkest hour, though Peter himself did not believe it. Yet as the scripture testifies, Peter did deny Christ not just once but three times. However Peter did not continue to deny, and even after he went away and cried heartbroken, he came back again to the communion of the other disciples, and when Christ was risen from the tomb he sent his message of hope again to his disciples and "to Peter also". The hand of love, even in denial is not withdrawn from the heart of the believer who might fail and fall yet reaches forth their hand again seeking God's forgiveness he will strengthen and renew again in his grace.

The grace of Christ will allow the church and the saints to be "sealed" until Christ comes again to call us to himself. Jesus in his prayer thanks his heavenly Father that all those which were given to Jesus after the flesh he has kept them through his grace, until the end, except for Judas which was foreordained as a vessel of dishonor, to betray Christ. Just as the sheep know and answer the voice of the shepherd, so Christ knows those who are his own and he will give us the grace required by our circumstances. In fact it is only through the experiencing of trial and testing which allows God to impart the fullness of his grace unto us in our life, and to experience and grow in him to the extent he desires for us. It is only through experience which our knowledge of God develops, our faith grows, and our love of God in sustaining and keeping us flourishes. Being "sealed" does not mean being separated from all the hardship which may arise. The people of Israel were brought into Egypt for a purpose as part of their national character development, and the experience of God's deliverance out of Egypt had a similar desired purpose and a testimony of God's power and faithfulness. Yet in the process of bringing Israel out of Egypt the people of God were not kept from all the trials which God brought upon the Egyptians. Many of the trials which God brought upon the Egyptians the Israelites themselves experienced. The final plague of the death of all the firstborn of Egypt, did not automatically distinguish between the different people, in this circumstance, the Israelites were commanded to take a specific action of placing the blood upon their doorposts to separate themselves from the plague. Through the blood they were sealed from the judgment of God upon the land.

The same principle displayed of the sealing of God's people will be applied through the tribulation period. As shown earlier God did not separate Israel from experiencing a number of the same plagues which came upon the Egyptians, though God never forgot his people, and when according to God's will the time of separating and sealing of his people arrived it was accomplished. Many people argue that the church will not have to suffer the tribulation but rather will be called unto Christ and separated from the world before the Antichrist arrives or the plagues begin. The Bible in its various descriptions and accounts relating to the final tribulation by the great preponderance of scripture indicates that the people of God will be present through a large amount of this time. Jesus does make mention that we should be counted worthy not to suffer the tribulation which will come upon the world. This scripture read in conjunction with other scriptures would appear to oppose the ones that show the people of God will be tested by fire, and commanded to hold fast to their testimony and profession. What these scriptures do indicate that the Church will be raptured before the end of the tribulation period, as with Israel and the plagues of Egypt; God in his love and grace will not suffer his children to go through all the plagues but will separate out his children after a certain point according to his own sovereign will. The argument that God will not countenance the suffering of his people at the hand of unrighteous sinners is not supported by various examples in scripture. What the Bible does support is that God will recompense vengeance and judgment upon the unrighteous for the persecution of his saints. The fact that God will not allow his church to suffer persecution would have been welcome news to the ears of the martyrs of Nero in ancient Rome, and the churches in China and Russia just to name a few modern countries.

"The Son of man indeed goeth as it is written of him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! Good were it for that man if he had never been born." [Mark 14: 21] Just as it was God's foreordained plan that Christ should be crucified as sacrifice for our sins and testimony against Israel's blindness. The same way it is foreordained that the saints during the time of tribulation should be persecuted, suffer and even be martyred but through all that yet we will be a testimony against the world. Through the persecution the word will be spread through the entire world, and each person will be faced with their own personal decision on how to respond. Based on those individual decisions God will be justified and glorified when he brings forth final judgment upon the gentile world. Those who accept the Beast and the number of his name, will receive the wrath of God and it had been better that they were never born. Just as Judas chose to betray Christ, so those in the last time will choose to follow the Beast. See Vessels of Dishonor.

God has established a preordained and established will for his elect (the church) during the tribulation. The church will vindicate Christ as we serve as a witness and testimony for Christ's faithfulness and righteousness against the sin, the hypocrisy, and self-righteousness of this present world. Once God established a plan and purpose he will not turn or repent. Jesus asked if it were possible that the trial which he was soon to experience could be taken away. Yet the prophets had foretold what Christ would have to suffer. The same as what scripture has foretold regarding the nature of the church's final persecution. Though we each as part of the body of Christ desire this cup likewise

pass from us; through love and faith in God's grace and sustaining power we are called to accept and endure faithful unto the end.

If ye were of the world the world would love his own, but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you... if they have persecuted me they will also persecute you. [John 16: 19-20]

As the persecution of the church proceeds each person will be forced to make an individual decision, confronted with the witness of the persecuted and hated church and their commitment to serve their God and him alone to worship, and his name alone to take, even in the face of death. Then the gentile world will be judged in the face of that witness as they worship the image and take the number of the Beast. Everything from the earthly principalities and powers of this world (their political, legal and economic system) which speak of individual dignity and human rights and freedom of belief will be forced to repudiate those central ideals as they are forced to worship the Beast, and force their citizens to do likewise. This purpose for the church is part of the determinate counsel of God just as Christ's suffering and sacrifice worked unto grace and salvation unto the whole world and especially the gentiles, so the sacrifice of the elect will work unto judgment of a sinful gentile world.

All things work together according to the purpose and will of God. God calls unto man in righteousness, and gives an opportunity for repentance and reconciliation in grace, and upon the rejection of that opportunity judgment is the result. This plan and progression is presented on numerous occasions and circumstances throughout scripture. The most relevant demonstration of this process is found in the ministry of Christ. Jesus came as a testimony to Israel when they rejected him, then God was justified in his judgment in blinding Israel spiritually as a people and showing grace unto the gentiles. The church represents the spirit of Christ, still abiding within the world. In this context it is understood that the ministry of grace in Christ has continued until this very day through his body corporately in the church. Christ stood as a testimony against the unrighteousness in the spiritual life of Israel; by the same measure Christ's church stands as a testimony against the unrighteousness of the gentile world. The world will hate us and kill us for our testimony, just as the leadership of the Jews did unto Jesus. Therefore God will be justified in his judgment of the gentile world and in turning again in love and glory to his earthly people Israel in opening their eyes again unto him, as Messiah, and again glorifying them as his people on the earth. Jesus Christ, his suffering and death operated for the blessing of the gentile world, the church and its final suffering and persecution will work a similar affect unto the opening again of the eyes and heart of the Jews.

... But even until this day when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when [in their hearts they] turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. [II Cor. 3: 15-16] ... that blindness in part is happened to Israel until the fullness of the gentiles is come in. [Rom. 11: 25] Ending of grace towards the gentiles (rapture of the church) means God opens the

heart/mind again of Israel as their Lord and reveals himself to the 'remnant'.

According to the revealed will of God, the church will have to endure its own persecution just as Christ did himself. We must remember that just as God sealed Christ through his sacrificial process God also will seal his elect during this period and bring us unto himself. The Bible tells the story of Mary from Bethany, breaking the box and anointing Christ as the time for his crucifixion approached. She came before the trial (scourging, crown of thorns, nailing to the cross, piercing his side) and anointed (sealed) Christ for the burying. See Mark 14: 3-8. It was known of God before that no one would do so when the time of trial was present; therefore God prepared his Son beforehand. Likewise God will seal his elect before the time of great sorrow (tribulation) to keep them preserved unto the end and will be faithful and merciful to them no matter what they suffer until the time of his returning for them. Paul wrote of the Corinthians they are his seal of apostleship in the Lord. [I Cor. 9: 1] Similarly the seal of the final church will be our testimony for Christ and our enduring persecution for his name; and Christ's grace in giving us the strength to so endure.

In God we boast all the day long, and praise, thy name for ever... Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat; and hast scattered us among the heathen... All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant. Our heart is not turned back neither have our steps declined from thy way. Thou hast sore broken us in the place of the dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death... yea for thy sake are we killed, all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter... For our soul is bowed down to the dust... Arise for our help, and redeem us for thy mercies sake. [Ps. 44: 8-26]

Precious in the sight of the LORD, is the death of his saints. [Ps. 116: 15]

Why does God require this degree of sacrifice and suffering of his people, the church specifically in the tribulation? The answer again is the same as with so many other similar questions is that it is because God has willed and desired it, regardless of whether we understand or agree with it. Yet God does give us various explanations within the context of scripture. First, regarding judgment, when God judges the nations it will be based on actions and behavior. The world's persecution of his church will be the basis when the final vials of tribulation are poured upon the world. Second, the church is the body of Christ in this world it is the spirit of Christ which gave him the strength in his flesh to endure the cross, and that same spirit lives within the true church and will allow it to suffer its trials in the flesh. Abiding this persecution will again serve as the testimony of the true spirit which lived in Christ resides within his body, the church, in this present world. Third, the Lord requires a bride, a peculiar people, separate from the world called unto himself, because of the final state of the church before the return of Christ, there will be the need of the purifying effect of tribulation to show not just to God, who already knows the heart, but to make evident to the world itself this differences in the heart of the individual professing believers. Forth, the Lord

will be magnified before the world and angels by the love of his bride through suffering; they remain faithful unto him, see example of Job. Fifth, the development in the character of the church in successfully enduring the tribulation will bind us even closer to our God in love, and faithfulness, to a level and degree which would not have been possible without experiencing that tribulation. Sixth, the tribulation church, the martyrs, will serve a unique capacity and position within the kingdom of God, in heaven, much as the Levites did in Israel. See later discussion New heaven/Earth.

... as it were appointed to death, for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. [I Cor. 4: 9]

Refined and made perfect by God [through tribulation], he shall purify the sons of Levi, purge them as gold or silver, that [they] may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness... I will come near to you to judgment... [Mal. 3: 2-5]

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help, my help cometh from the LORD.. He shall not suffer my foot to be moved... the LORD shall preserve me from all evil; he shall preserve thy soul. The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth... [Ps. 121]

I saw thrones they that sat upon them, judgment was given unto them, souls of them beheaded for witness of Jesus, and for word of God, and which had not worshiped the Beast, neither his image, neither received his mark... lived and reigned with Christ.. On such the second death has no power, they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with him a thousand years [on earth]... [Rev. 20: 4-6, 14]

Christ's church will not endure all the tribulation. The final part of the great tribulation, God will return and call his persecuted church unto himself. Christ will comfort those who cry unto him, and will cover his children when he brings forth the worst of his tribulation upon a world after the restrainer of God's judgment has been removed. Even throughout the trials which his bride are called upon to endure his ear is not deaf to their call, and though he withholds his deliverance for a very short time, his heart is still touched by our cry, and his wrath grows hotter against the persecutors of his people.

Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another, and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels, and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. [Malachi 3: 16-17]

... men ought always to pray, and not to faint... [parable of the widow's perseverance and the unjust judge]... and shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? [Luke 18: 1-8]

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels. In flaming fire taking vengeance on them who know not God... [II Thes. 1: 7-8]

For as lightening... so shall also the Son of man be in his day... as it was in days of [Noah] so shall it be in the days of the Son of man... eat... drink... merry... until day [Noah] entered into the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the day of Lot... but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed... Remember Lots wife, whosoever shall seek to save his life shall loose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it... two women shall be grinding together, the one shall be take, the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. [Luke 17: 24-36]

God knows those who suffer persecution for his name's sake. He is just in remembering our sacrifices made for him. The rewards in heaven will reflect our works of love for him. Though our works will never in themselves justify us unto salvation before God, yet our works of love and faithfulness to Christ will form basis for how he does dispense out rewards beyond the basic wage of salvation. See further discussion of Rewards. God makes special provision for his saints who sacrifice and suffer for his name. It is his pleasure to wipe away the tears shed for him; in fact he holds them in remembrance, even as praise offered to him operates as an offering of incense in his presence.

For thou [LORD] hast been a strength to the poor... a shadow from the heat... he shall swallow up death in victory; and the LORD God, will wipe away tears from all faces... [Isa. 25: 4, 8]

Therefore are thy before the throne of God... he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more... neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. [Rev. 7: 15-17]

The LORD is thy keeper, the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day nor the moon by night... The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for ever more. [Ps. 121: 5-8]

The tribulation of the church will form the basis of God's final judgment of the nations. Judgment of the nations is one of the defined spheres of divinely ordained judgment, see earlier discussion. God, as with individual man, is constantly engaged in a process of judging nations; this is not a one time climatic event as the Final Judgment will be for each person. Governments rise and fall; all this is part of God's own plan and purpose. God directs the paths of nations just as he does of individuals according to his own will. The Bible is full of promises of blessings and curses for nations and government, just as it does for individual people. The tribulation and the times following will serve as a culmination of national judgment. Through the tribulation no nation or people will be spared suffering, yet at the end certain peoples and nations will be rewarded and blessed while others will receive the full fruits of their own conduct. The primary area of national blessings and curses is found related to the treatment of the children of Israel by other countries. This scripture as with all the promises of God continues in full force and effect today. The same principle will be applied to the world and its people in the treatment of the church during the tribulation. Some people and nations will show more kindness towards the church and God's people during this period and they will receive the benefits of that kindness in judgment just as wrath will be dispensed upon those who took pleasure in the suffering of the saints.

FINAL REVELATION AND PURPOSE OF CHRIST AND FOR HIS CHURCH

Basis for Final Judgment

Previously we discussed judgment as an integral aspect of the character of God. The Final Judgment is where the final revelation in this present world occurs; at this point the character of every man is judged against the standard of God's righteousness. All words and actions are brought to account. When discussing the Final Judgment a few questions are most commonly raised. First, what is this standard of righteousness against which we are to be judged and whom is it that sits in judgment of us? Second, how is it that all man can be held to account based on a single standard? Finally, what is the standard for the member of the body of Christ as opposed to the unsaved?

Jesus will judge the living and the dead. All man shall stand before him to give account. The standard which Jesus will use to judge is according to the Word. But it is then said what is this "Word" upon which we are all called to account? This Word is the expressed righteousness of God. The Word created the heaven and earth. All things exist through the Word. The Word walked in the garden with Adam and Eve. The Word was delivered to Moses and wrote on tables of stone. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us in Christ Jesus. The Word upon Jesus' death and resurrection was delivered through the Holy Ghost to live in our hearts and lives. Finally it will be the Word which quickens the believer to Christ when he comes again to receive his bride. While Jesus lived and died to redeem his people out of sin through grace; when Christ stands as returning Lord he will rule in righteousness and judgment. The law will once more be exalted in its original capacity as schoolmaster and teacher, illuminating the unrighteousness of man.

He that rejecteth me and receive not my words, hath one that judgeth him, the Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

[John 12: 48] see also II Tim. 4: 1

... I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. [John 14: 6]

For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. [Hab. 2: 14]

God will be magnified before all humanity when he will judge each man according to the perfect standards which he has established. Those who are found righteous through their belief in Christ and acknowledging him as the risen Lord the same will be justified by their faith and their sins will be blotted out by the blood of Jesus' New Testament sacrifice. All others who have not accepted Christ, they will be judged righteously under the law. All men have sinned and come short of the glory of God. The law through its condemnation works death. Each person will be shown to have come

short of that standard, and who are not washed in the blood of the Lamb. I Cor. 15: 56, II Cor. 2: 15-16. Jesus will be magnified by judgment. Philip. 2: 9-11.

It is still argued that how can God judge each person according to the law? Not every man has the same law. Not every man has the same understanding of what is right under the law. Not every man has even heard the Word. This argument fails in two respects. First, it fails to appreciate exactly the full nature and extent of the revealed Word as expressed to the whole world throughout history. Second, it assumes that an absolute awareness of the Word is required before judgment under the law is permitted.

The revelation of God's righteousness has been made manifest to all mankind in three ways, in nature and the wondrous order of creation; in man's individual conscience; and finally in the law which forms the foundation of every human government. See earlier discussion of Righteousness generally. Nature and the physical world speaks to our soul and to our mind, calling us to acknowledge and seek after God. Even the blind if they can not see the light yet when in the presence of the sun they can still feel the light. The order and structure of nature, opposite to the foundation of the rationale for evolution, speaks to the presence of basic underlying order in all creation. Once this order is acknowledged and accepted as existing then the natural question arises what is the source of this order? The answer brings the heart of man back to the inescapable fact of God's existence; once man sincerely seeks to know and find God he will be found. This may not be an immediate and full revelation but the process of seeking and knocking is what God requires of us, and he will guide us upon that sincere search to the truth, finally manifest in Christ Jesus. Numerous gentiles in the Bible had a direct knowledge and relationship with the God of Israel, the original King of Shiloh to whom Abraham first paid tithes was said to be a priest of the LORD, and even Balaam is shown to have possessed a personal knowledge and relationship with the living God. But Balaam also stands as a prominent example of the fact that knowledge and righteousness are not the same, because none can deny he knew God yet his attitude towards God was based on self-interest and not an attitude of righteousness.

Ye should turn from [idol worship] unto the living God, which made heaven and earth... who in time past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left himself not without witness... rain from heaven... fruitful seasons... and gladness. [Acts 14: 15-17]

And hath made of one blood all nations of men... and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation. That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he be not far from every one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being, as certain of your poets also have said, for we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God we ought not to think the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art by man's device... the times of this ignorance [concerning God] God winked at, but now, commandeth all men everywhere to repent. Because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in

righteousness, by that he hath ordained whereof he hat given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. [Acts 17: 26-31]

God has made himself known to all men since the creation of the world, and [the invisible things] is seen clearly and understood by the things that are made, so they are without excuse. Because when they knew God they gloried him not as God, neither were thankful but became vain in their own imagination and their foolish heart was darkened... changed incorruptible into an image... professing themselves wise they became fools.. who changed the truth of God into a lie and worshiped the creature more than the Creator... and even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge God gave them over to a reprobate mind... [Rom. 1: 19-28] [Rom. 8: 9]

The conscience is the second basis upon which God's righteousness is made known to all men. Even if a man does not have a full revelation and understanding of God's existence, he still has an innate sense of morality and what is "right". This inner voice which each person has either acquits us of our actions or it can convict us, when we "know" we should be acting in some different way. This convicting of our mind can be for large moral issues or it can occur in very small and intimate circumstances for which most other people might not even question. Without question our conscience can be shaped especially over time by our experience and environment. The fact that a person's conscience is not affected by actions and attitudes which an "ordinary" individual would find objectionable, does not remove that person from judgment. We previously discussed Vessels of Dishonor the fact that consciences can become hardened over time, and that because of the choices of parents and ancestors in previous generations create an environment which makes it even more difficult to come to an understanding or appreciation of righteousness. God himself can blind the heart and harden the conscience according to his own will and judgment during this life, making it impossible for a person to realize their need for repentance and keep them from any desire to change their sinful behavior. Through this process God can through his sovereign authority guarantee final judgment upon certain of the unrighteous.

There is a law by which each person will be judged, the Jew under the law, gentile having not the law yet their very nature tell them to do the things contained in the law, are a law unto themselves, show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience being witness, accusing or excusing, God shall judge the secrets of men according to the gospel. [Rom. 2: 12-16]

The final area of revelation and standard of righteousness upon which judgment is predicated is the law itself. The law especially human law is the standard upon which human government (as divinely established along with the individual and family) establishes what is right and acceptable behavior. The abrogation of this law justifies the imposition of judgment by government authority. In the previous example the conscience of a specific person may not tell them that a certain behavior is wrong, but if

the law states it is a violation then government is still justified in judgment upon the individual. "The law" in theological discussions is normally understood as referring to "the law of Moses". Without question this is the highest revelation of the law given directly by God to man. But just because other governments did not receive the full righteousness of the law as declared to Israel, did not take away from the authority for condemnation for the law which they did possess. From a conceptual standpoint therefore it can be said that all law of all government is good unto righteousness. The law after all is fundamentally an expression of the conscience, derived itself innately from the Creator, showing what is right and wrong between individuals in the society. A person who for whatever reason is not condemned by their conscience does not keep them from being independently condemned by the law. From a practical standpoint, all law since it is discerned and developed over time through sinful men, like the Jewish law itself, will be subject to being diluted and even corrupted over time. Law just like individual's conscience can deteriorate to such a degree that it no longer reflects any semblance to true godly righteousness. This process happens much the same way as with individuals over time through generations and generations moving further away from God in their action and attitudes. The current generation becomes the recipient of the choices and decisions of prior generations and without grace and renewing from God will still be judged according to the initial law which their fathers themselves corrupted and turned away from.

All mankind comes from a single source (Adam and Eve). God made himself known to Adam and he followed God by faith even after his sin. Cain left off following God but Seth continued and walked by faith. Eventually Noah alone was found righteous and faithful before God, in the whole world. Only Noah and his sons and their wives remained and they made an offering and gave thanks to God. Yet God's creation (mostly) again forsook their obedience and worship to God and instead began to worship images and the creation rather than the Creator. Even though they left God yet God's testimony to himself continues to exist to such of mankind that would turn their heart and with faith toward him, seek after him, he made himself known to them. Abraham worshiped God and followed him by faith as did his children through history, sometimes to more success than others. This continued until God sent his Son to bring light and salvation to the whole world which had fallen into darkness. The gentiles who as is shown over time left worshiping God, were given over to their own vain imaginations and will be judged by the Word in righteousness because they had known God (in the earliest times) and had his testimony still before them through creation itself, yet they refused to seek God who created all things and instead worshiped their own creation.

The argument is still made how can God judge and condemn a person for something when the person did not know it was a sin, his conscience did not condemn him, and even the laws under which he lived did not condemn him? The answer is that God as sovereign Lord is free to impose any standard and criteria for judgment which he desires. There is an old saying that ignorance of the law is not a defense. This is true in regards to human law, and it is equally accurate in regards to God's law and judgment. A person who had been raised by their family not to think that illegal drugs are bad, and even being raised in a community did not impose sanctions related to it, if that person

went into the larger community and took a large amount of his drugs with him, the community would be fully justified in imposing the sanctions called for in violating the drug laws even though the individual had no understanding that the possession and transporting of those drugs was wrong. Thus a lack of awareness of the law does not negate the existence of the law; by the same token that same lack of awareness will not form a defense against judgment under the law.

Every person will thus stand in judgment under the law. The nature and extent of the law may vary depending on the individual but each person will be judged equally by the Word in the person of Jesus Christ in the glorified power of his majesty as King of all creation. Each man stands in awareness of the existence of God and his obligation to seek out the will of his creator through the testimony of the world itself. The call of our heart through our conscience gives testimony to the call of righteousness, and the law expressed in government gives testimony to the call of God's eternal righteousness just as creation gives testimony to that which is invisible. Both nature and the law are the outward expression however imperfect of the invisible and eternal standard set forth in the Word. The Word thus gives glory to the righteousness of the eternal infinite and all righteous God, and before this perfect standard every man will stand in comparison.

For this cause was the gospel preached to them who are dead, that they might be judged. [I Peter 4: 6]

The law when Paul and the apostles and prophets refer to it is pointed towards the law of Moses as the perfect manifestation of God's righteousness. But when it says that the Jews will stand in judgment under the law, it must be understood that the gentiles will stand similarly convicted under the expression of their own law, and their conscience as well. Each and every man, whether Jew or gentile, standing in their own righteousness and justification by works will be found lacking, because they will stand in contrast and comparison to the example of Christ himself in his life and works and attitude. The smallest sin and failing of an individual no matter how insignificant it may appear now and in terms of this world will become as dark and vile as the most heinous sin, when held in contrast to the total sinlessness manifest in the Word through Christ's life and witness.

Each and every person who is judged under the law will be convicted before God. Because of sin, the penalty required will be the same. There is one distinction drawn made in scripture between those found guilty before God according to the Word. This variance in judgment will be based on the degree of "condemnation" which each person will receive. The judgment of God reflected in terms of how condemnation is applied in the life of the condemned sinner is not specifically stipulated within scripture itself. What we do have is the assurance that in the application of righteous judgment that Christ will be true and equitable to each man based on our particular circumstance and situation. The greatest condemnation is reserved for those who had the greatest opportunity to partake of the fullness of God's revealed Word in righteousness and yet turned their back away. Thus the Jew is in greater condemnation before God than the gentile who received not the fullness of the light of the law in righteousness. The scribe and the Pharisee who

were in the political and spiritual elite of Israel were the recipient of even greater condemnation than the ordinary Jew. The statement that those to whom more is given, more is required, finds its culmination in the greater condemnation associated with judgment.

“Those to whom much is given much is required” in the final judgment God will judge us based on our experience and knowledge of what we understood concerning what is right as well as our capacity to do good based on that knowledge. Part of the final judgment which will vary will relate to the degree that the basis for those who are judged under the law, as opposed to under grace through Christ, are found deficient. Look to the book of Amos chapters 1-5, as an example of this principle. God lists out the transgressions of various nations and the punishment of fire which each nation would receive for their sin. All the sins of the gentile nations against their neighbors involved very hostile and merciless atrocities. However Israel’s offenses, at least in comparison to the offenses listed against their neighbors, through the eyes of man appear relatively minor, yet God’s judgment to them is the same. The offense of Israel is they despised the law of the LORD, and did not keep his commandments, they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes; and turned aside the way of the meek; gave the Nasserite wine to drink; and commanded the prophets to prophesy not. See Amos 2: 4-12 for these items. Compared to the offenses of Israel’s neighbors as listed none of these offenses would appear to justify the punishment imposed by God. But because of Israel’s special relationship and knowledge of the law a much higher standard was imposed on them and their actions and conduct. The same standard will be applied in the final judgment. The punishment (hell) will still be the same for all. The failures and transgressions listed by God in imposing judgment will be much more detailed and nuanced against those who had greater knowledge of God’s righteousness and his will yet chose to follow their own will, and justify themselves.

And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not and did things worthy of stripes shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given of him shall much be required and to whom men have committed much, of him they shall ask the more. [Luke 12: 47-48]

One way in which this “greater condemnation” may well be manifest in the process of judgment is in the memory of each individual. Though judgment will be everlasting according to scripture how each person experiences this will still have its own unique individual component. Hell will be all the worse based on the fact that each person will have to spend eternity in the knowledge and reflection upon missed opportunities and their own decisions and finally the words of the judgment spoken by Christ continually ringing in the ears. Those who had no in depth knowledge of righteousness or no sustained contact with the seed of the truth in their life will not have as much condemnation to reflect upon. But for those who knew to do good and chose not to do it, or who experienced the seed of the Word growing in their life yet they let the cares of this world, the weeds of lust and pride, choke those seeds and eventually die in

their heart, those people will have to contemplate that choice throughout all eternity. The condemnation of wasted opportunity will burn in the mind as eternally as the fire and brimstone which surrounds them outwardly in hell.

Judgment and specifically the Final Judgment bring with it all the connotations of hell fire and brimstone; however, there is more to judgment than just that. Every man must stand in judgment; but those who stand in Christ and his blood applied to their heart will be greeted as children and faithful servants. The sins which were before Christ and the cross were red as scarlet now they are wiped away and are become as snow before the eyes of our Judge, who is himself also our Savior and Redeemer. The final judgment becomes the final stage where God through Christ Jesus is justified in righteousness in calling a peculiar and separated people unto himself eternally. We are not justified because of who we are, because of our works or because of our own righteousness; but rather it is the righteousness of God himself who through his own power and love for us, made a way of justification possible through himself. God will be glorified before all creation and in lifting up the poor, the downtrodden and the vilest of sinners in earlier times, and through his justifying and renewing blood making us heirs to glory and joint-heirs with Christ Jesus. The Final Judgment is the public proclamation of our new status and relationship with Christ. Our past and our failures are permanently put behind us, never to burden us again.

Many more people will stand before the throne claiming Christ as their justifier than those whom are acknowledged by Christ as Judge. Claiming Christ and being claimed by Christ is not the same. Many will know Christ on an intellectual basis; many will have seen the power and works of Christ in their personal life and even in their ministry. Many will believe sincerely in their heart that they have been saved, that their profession of Christ as their savior and that he had forgiven them of their sins, yet when the day of accounting in judgment arrives, their sins and transgressions will remain. Accepting Christ in love, and faith, means actually submitting the heart and spirit along with the body to Christ. Using Christ for our own purposes, and allowing him to operate within the heart and spirit and even the body within certain limits, will bring us to a certain point and relationship with Jesus but it does not assure our salvation in the judgment. Christ knocks on the door of our heart and desires to enter in, and he is faithful and just to come in and minister to the fullest extent that we will allow him in our heart and lives. Yet when we stop, when we retain certain prerogatives and rights to autonomy within our hearts and lives, Christ will not force us to allow him further in. Yet for Christ's blood and grace to cover all our sins and transgressions we must first give ourselves completely without reservation into his hands.

If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O LORD who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee that thou may be feared [reverential trust in God's mercy and grace with hatred of evil] ... Let Israel hope in the LORD; for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him there is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities. [Ps. 130: 3-8]

Matthew 25 set forth three parables which Christ sets forth as examples for how judgment will be determined either to eternal punishment or eternal life. The first parable of the five wise/ five foolish virgins demonstrates the need for a personal spiritual relationship which we must work to keep and maintain, while awaiting the coming of Christ again, the responsibility for maintaining ourselves (heart spirit) is our own. Second, the parable of the servants and talents show that we each may be given different amounts, kinds, degrees of talents, yet whatever we are given the Lord then puts responsibility on us individually to strive endeavor and work to increase those talents and to seek to develop others, to just accept what God gives us by his grace but to actually expand and work to increase that which God bestows as a good servant. Third, the parable of the sheep and the goats show that with a right spirit toward God and putting into action those talents which God gave us and which further talents we have sought to develop, we must put them into actual use by showing forth the love the grace the kindness of Christ to those in need even as we would unto Christ himself. All three of these areas individually and finally in connection with one another provides the basis which Christ will evaluate each individual believer's lives and works in judgment.

Strive to enter in at the straight gate, for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut the door, and ye begin to stand without and to knock at the door, saying Lord, Lord open unto us, and he shall answer and say unto you; I know you not... shall ye begin to say, we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast tough in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity... ye shall see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east and from the west, and from the north, and from the south and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. [Luke 13: 24-29]

Claiming to accept and know Christ and actually accepting him as Lord in your heart and giving your heart, mind, body and attitude to him is different. The Bible says many will stand before God claiming to have preached, saved others, and cast out devils in Jesus name, and Jesus will say depart from me ye workers of iniquity. See Mat. 7: 21-23. How can this be? Because those people never submitted their heart, spirit and attitude to Christ, what they accomplished they did for themselves, not in love of Christ. The Bible states that when God separates the wheat from the tares it will not be based on what man bases judgment, but reconciling the outward (words and actions) to the heart, intention, and motives. Those whose heart and purpose, even in outwardly good works, was to glorify and exalt themselves or to feed their own desires and material ambitions, will be rejected.

But he that glorifieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth. [II Cor. 10: 17-18]

The Bible never states the non-Christian will be judged because of a lack of forgiveness alone. The unbeliever will be judged in part according to the very standards which the person themselves will have given against others during this life when discovering their neighbor's own sins and moral deficiencies. At the judgment God will reveal that person's own action and attitudes which will condemn themselves before a righteous Lord. Yet under the law which the world (unbelievers) will be judged there is no explicit requirement of forgiveness. However, those claiming the forgiveness of Christ for their sins can be held to this standard in their judgment under grace. See Believer's Attitudes. Once forgiveness is sought, through repentance, then through God's own example the burden is on us to extend forgiveness to others in a spirit of love and mercy. See example of God's forgiveness of Israel, I Kings 8: 33-36.

There is a burden, placed on each of us, to extend forgiveness even as we have ourselves been forgiven. In the final judgment, separating the wheat from the tares, there are some who actually believe they are saved (based on their outward holiness and manifestation of righteousness) yet when God will judge their heart they will be found lacking. In the Lord's Prayer it goes so far as to say God's forgiveness is predicated on our attitude of forgiveness unto others [see Mat. 6: 9-14] Finally Jesus in his parable discusses the Master who forgave a servant a great debt, that servant went out and did not forgive a fellow servant who only owed him a very small amount. When the master learned of this he brought back that debt (previously forgiven) and sent the servant to be tormented (hell). [see Mat. 18: 21-35] This indicates that many people who believe they are saved and yet refuse to forgive for some offense against them, and hold on to their bitterness and other attitudes of the heart associated therewith will not be found written in the Lamb's book of life. God will and bring to account the sins and transgressions of many who claim to have committed their own sins in repentance to Christ, yet in their heart and feelings toward others who have offended them or who they know have committed some transgression in their personal lives, they refuse to forgive them, just as they without qualification accept their own forgiveness. Not having a right attitude relating to forgiveness leads to other attitudes of the heart such as spitefulness, bitterness, fear, and doubt, all of which are abominations to God, just as much as fornication and murder.

The Final Judgment for those who have taken on Christ with a heart of love and spirit of faith, have no fear or doubt. Their heart is founded upon the Rock. Jesus will call us in love unto him, he will never leave us and forsake us especially in judgment. The judgment is only the final culmination in this heaven and this earth of the preordained and established plan of God to make for himself a bride and a body washed and purified by himself and separated unto himself, yet who out of the free will and choice which he has given to each person have similarly loved God. This mutuality of love and faith brings us into communion with God through the person of Jesus Christ, is the culmination of this present work which was begun before the world was created. The trials and tribulations and sins of this present world will no longer be addressed again in the world to come, once unrighteousness is put away in final judgment, Satan and the other instruments of unrighteousness will never return a second time.

But God Commendest his love toward us that, while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, how much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life... but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ's ... atonement. [Rom 5: 8-11]

For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. [I Thes. 5: 9]

... for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ... who shall confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. [I Cor. 1: 4-9]

What do ye imagine against the LORD? He will not make an utter end? Affliction shall not rise up the second time. [Nahum 1: 9]

God's Grace & Rewards in Heaven

Just as by God's sovereign authority and will he dispenses grace (unto salvation and blessings) in this world to whom he wills (vessels of honor and dishonor) likewise his divine prerogative will continue in heaven. He will lift up whosoever he will and even abase as it seems good unto him. The Beatitudes state 'The last shall be first, and the first last' does not mean necessarily that living for God our whole lives or what we experience will entitle you to any extra rewards. Each will receive the basic 'wages' but additional rewards are entirely within the discretion of our heavenly Father. See Mat. 20: 8-16. There will be places of honor and differentiations in honor, based on God's grace and by our lives, works and attitudes and trials in this present world. Reward is given as it seems good unto God.

The previous discussion of judgment shows there is a uniform standard wage for sin, which is death, yet there will be degrees of condemnation based on the individual's own life. Similarly to the redeemed believer who finds acceptance in the sight of God through the blood of Christ in the judgment, there is a standard wage which all will receive. God has prepared for each of us a glorified body, a mansion in his holy city, a crown will be given us, and we shall eat and commune with Christ face to face. These are certain of the basic elements each of us will receive as children of God. Some will receive greater rewards and blessings in the kingdom than others, the distribution of these further rewards are according to the good pleasure of the Father, as it pleases him, based on his own criteria and will.

The commendation and rewards of God will be based on the wise stewardship of what we are blessed with in this life. Regarding material wealth, were we generous and wise in its distribution for the furtherance of the kingdom of God? If we have been given intellectual gifts or technical expertise and skill, did we submit them to the use of God within the body of Christ? If we are called to one of the specific ministries within the church did we dedicate ourselves to their use with a spirit of love and meekness, to the edification and exhortation of our brothers and sisters within the church? Those to whom much is given, much is required. Just as with the widow who gave her pennies while others were putting in their treasures, God knows each person's own situation and circumstance, and his evaluation though not always evident through the eyes of the flesh is perfect in the spirit.

Everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brothers, or sisters... or lands for my names sake, shall receive a hundred fold, and shall inherit eternal life. But many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first. [Mat.19: 29-30]

... the good works of some are manifest beforehand, and they that are otherwise can not be hid. [I Tim. 5: 25]

He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again. [Prov. 19: 17]

So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the LORD his God. [II Chron. 26: 21]

What is it that causes God to give attention to certain hearts and lives in scripture, more than others? Without question God loves each individual. Yet there are certain figures in scripture which are constantly pointed towards as examples, and whom God gives honor because of their attitudes. Just a few of these individuals are Abraham, Moses, and David. David was said to be a man after God's own heart, and God in return loved and especially honored David. The city which David adopted as his capital, God bestowed honor also, and God promised the kingdom would never fail from David's seed, which was accomplished through Christ. David had a heart which naturally turned towards God from his youth. Yet David sustained that attitude and tenderness in spirit and attitude towards God despite the various trials, tribulations, and even temptations which he experienced in his life. Each of us stands in our own lives as potential David's in the eyes of God. God desires and wants each of us to be David's, based on our own individual characters. God loves to be loved, to be sought after, to be desired after. Anyone who comes before God desiring him, to know him, will not be turned away empty.

David was a man after God's heart, he sought after him, he loved God's word and desired to dwell in his temple and to inquire after him. God's praise was constantly in his lips. Jesus praised Mary for sitting at his feet listening to his words while Martha worked after the physical. Bible says not to lay up treasures in this world but to seek after the things of God. The things of this world shall fall away the cares of this world will not stand. This world shall itself pass away by fire. Where your treasure is there will your heart be also. God's eternal rewards will be passed out to those wise stewards/builders to those who have laid up works pleasing and acceptable to God in this present world. God rewards and loves right choices (judgments)...efforts focused on him.. Knowing him... pleasing him... not ourselves, deny yourself and follow him, thus shall ye have treasures and rewards in heaven. See Luke 18: 22. All works should be based on a spirit and attitude of godly love. The focus thus becomes, a life of faith, moving forth in 'works' (as a natural result of our love for Christ, not as the basis of our own justification) in a spirit of love. See also John 15: 15-17.

Forsaken opportunities and undeveloped talents will also form the basis upon which greater future heavenly blessings will be abandoned because of our individual decisions in this life. Many times God desires much more from us in our lives and our spiritual development than what we ever accomplish or even realize we could have accomplished. Often we become so concerned with the material and worldly concerns that we neglect the greater and weightier things of the spirit. There is nothing wrong with tending to worldly concerns. Not everything worldly is necessarily sinful. It is the misplacing of emphasis and importance on worldly things which can cause them to become sinful. See discussion of Fornication Adultery and Other Fleshly Sins. Jesus in

talking to Martha never rebukes her for attending to material needs, yet he does show her there are higher spiritual priorities, which he wants us to be concerned with and to seek after.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven... For where your treasure is there will your heart be also. [Mat. 6: 19-21]

There is a great evil which I have seen under the sun, namely riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. But those riches perish by evil travail... As he came forth of his mother's womb; naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. And this is also a sore evil in all points as he came, so shall he go; and what profit hath he that hath labored for the wind? [Ecccl. 5: 13-16]

... he that layeth up treasures for himself... is not rich toward God... Seek not what ye shall eat... drink, neither be ye of a doubtful mind... rather seek ye the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bag which wax not old, a treasure in heaven which faileth not where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. [Luke 12: 21-34]

Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these ['treasures'] things shall be added unto you. [Mat. 6: 33]

What the Bible instructs us is that the things of this world shall all pass away. It is what we put our heart and effort into in this life that will continue into eternity. Knowledge will pass away, even prophecies regarding this present world shall fail when the world itself passes away. Yet the things of God, spiritual things, are what is eternal. The Word of God will never pass away, our love of the Word and thus of God himself will abide. Earlier we discuss trial and tribulations and the scriptures commonly equate these things to a fire; a fire which purges the cares and concerns of this world from our heart and lives. It is so easy to become preoccupied and burdened with material issues and concerns. Scripture exhorts us to give no thought to tomorrow what we will wear and what we will eat; God promises he will supply all our needs according to his riches in glory. Rather we are give attention to the things of God which will not pass away. Seek, study, knock, and inquire after the things of God and his righteousness, these things will not pass away, but will rather abide the fire.

... my beloved brethren be ye steadfast, unmovable always abounding in the works of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. [I Cor. 15: 58]

The only things which we will retain and take with us from this life into the next are what we accomplish in our walk with God. These works will not justify us before God. Works, as has already been discussed, are not the basis of our salvation. But those works will form the basis for how God evaluates each person as part of the dispensing of greater or lesser rewards in heaven. Exactly what are these “rewards” which God will dispense in conjunction with and following the Final Judgment? The Bible never gives a specific or definitive list. Yet they will very likely follow many of what we understand as blessings within this life and this existence. The Bible makes reference in Jesus parables of servants being given greater or lesser kingdoms upon the return of their master. The crowns likely will not all be the same. The glorified bodies which we are given will not be the same. The knowledge and technical expertise of each person will not be the same.

...give your effort to those things eternal, the things of this world will pass away. [I Cor. 13: 8-11] Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine [Jesus] and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock. [Mat. 7: 24] See the Parable of the Wise Builder.

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. [Luke 21: 33]

But without faith it is impossible to please him, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. [Heb. 11: 6]

... study to show thyself approved unto God.. [II Tim. 2: 15]

Though I speak with tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity [love]. I am become as sounding brass and tinkling symbol. And though I have the gift of prophesy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing... Charity [love] suffereth long, and is kind, charity envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil... rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth... now I know in part but then shall I know even as I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity these three, but the greatest of these is charity. [I Cor. 13: 1-13] [see also discussion of Fruits of the Spirit]

I Cor. 3. Refers to how we build our spiritual and physical lives. We are made new creatures in Christ and our new lives and works/actions are based on that new foundation laid for us in Christ Jesus. Everything in this life and in the next (eternity) will be judged upon the standard set in Christ. Everyone who has the firm foundation of

salvation through Christ as sacrifice for our sins and as our Living Savior will have eternal life, The basic process is set forth as: (1) Repentance; (2) Baptism in Jesus name; (3) Receiving the Holy Ghost, our comforter, and (4) following after Christ in love, taking up our cross and following him, mortifying the deeds of the flesh and the spirit. Every man builds upon this foundation which is in Christ. Finally, he who endures to the end the same shall be saved. What it is that we build upon, that 'foundation', is the basis each person will receive 'reward' (beyond salvation itself). See I Cor. 3: 15. Our 'works' relate to how each person chooses to build upon that foundation once laid in our lives. 'Works' include applying the teaching of the Bible in our individual lives the principles, the attitudes having a right spirit and attitude which results in 'good soil' in which other fruits of the spirit can flourish and grow.

Paul says that we shall know even as we are known. God knows us not according to the standard and measure of this world, according to how much we possess materially, or how good looking we are. God rather knows each man according to our hearts, or character, and desires, in conjunction with our behavior. This is how we all are judged. Moreover our sins are forgotten by God. What will abide and what we will build upon in heaven, comes back to the spiritual fruit which we develop before God in this life. See discussion of Fruits of the Spirit. Love of God, love of others even as Christ loves us, righteousness, meekness, humility, peace, longsuffering, all these are the foundation blocks which God knows in our lives, and form the basis which we bring forward and develop further in the new heaven and new earth. All the knowledge of this world along with the material things will pass away. God himself will teach us knowledge just as he will himself create the material world which we will enjoy. Our heart, spirit, attitude, and character will abide and continue on into eternity and it is the effect of the development of the spiritual gifts in this life which themselves affect our character, all these work together to form the basis for what God can and will bestow his rewards and blessings in the world to come.

Whomsoever therefore that humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven. [Mat. 18: 4] ... even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. [I Peter 3: 4] God gives greatest the glory and honor unto those who are humble and those who are meek. For one thing they have a spirit and attitude to listen and be led by God. Second in heaven all things will glorify and magnify God in Christ. Those greatest in the kingdom will themselves magnify and glorify him who sits on the throne and not themselves. Satan's sin from the beginning was his pride and desire for glory himself; he was one the highest angels and he failed completely because of his attitude. See I Peter 5: 5-6.

You know that the princes of the gentiles exercise dominion over them, they that are great exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you, but whoever will be great among you, let him be your minister. And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant. Even as the Son of Man. [see Mat 20: 25-28] see also Mat 23: 12. A whole new spirit attitude demeanor will exist in the kingdom of Heaven. To be lifted up we have to be humble, loving, committed to others in our own spirit and

attitude. All the glory honor and praise will go to our Lord and his kingdom, not focusing on ourselves or our own personal glory and honor (leading to pride).

Whosoever hath to him it shall be given and he shall have the more abundance, but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. [Mat. 13: 12] Those saved by grace of God will receive those things which God had previously given to those who are lost. God's rewards and blessings relate not only to the material but also to the spiritual, intellectual, and artistic as well. No one will take anything with them (other than their memories) into Hell. Those blessings that had been theirs in this life God will distribute to his children in heaven. It should also be remembered that even those saved and who enter heaven, but who put their effort and focus in this life primarily upon the material world, and not upon spiritual things, they who may have been richly blessed in terms of material or intellectual gifts this world, may end up being 'last' in the distribution of blessings in the future kingdom.

The distribution of rewards and blessings are thus within the sovereign judgment and discretion of God through Christ. Some of us may not receive the degree of blessings which we feel we deserve, or even which through comparison with the outward works and accomplishments of others it seems we should receive. Yet God has a purpose and knows what each of us needs and will best allow us to accomplish God's plan and purpose for us in eternity. See related discussion of Temptations. Sometimes not receiving a blessing may be the best thing that can happen to us. After all receiving too much blessing can be bigger burden than not seeming to receive enough, see Satan as an example. What we are called upon is to trust and love God, that he cares for us and will provide abundantly for our every need and even our desires according to his riches in glory, and according to his perfect timing.

Divine Position of the Angels and Man in Glory

Freedom of choice is the common characteristic that Satan and the other angels (fallen and un-fallen) share with man. Fallen angels can be placed into two groups: (1) kept not their first estate but left their own habitation (see Jude 1: 6) he cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment (see II Peter 2:4), and (2) others who chose Satan as their leader. One of the primary differences between man and angels is that God determined to show his mercy, grace, and love towards man. Though we did fall and sin yet God determined to make a way of reconciliation for us through his love. The angels when they sinned there is no mercy seat provided there is only eventual judgment from a righteous God. The relationship of the angels to God is that of Master and Servant, not that of love, as between a Groom and Bride or as a Father and Child.

All through the Bible as it has been shown God has a progression or plan of development according to his divine will and authority by which he moves from the lower to the higher or the flesh to the spirit. This relationship can be seen through God's will and ordained plan reflecting his personal relationship between man and that of angels. Angels were created first, but it was not God's plan that his relationship with them would be of the nature which he desired with his creation man. Even though angels are described in certain places as sons of God this reference is to the fact that like man when God created both groups he formed them after his own perfect image which he made for himself from the beginning to interact with his creation. However angels were formed by God with a certain preordained purpose for them; yet without the promise of being lifted up in their future relationship with God which was given to man. They were made to serve and worship him. The angels are given a choice whether to fulfill their purpose but upon making the wrong choice they will receive judgment without the hand of mercy and grace being extended unto them. Their relationship is most closely represented beginning with Ishmael so far as he represented the son after the flesh or under the law, not the son under the promise. Earthly Israel could also be viewed as a representation of the angels in the heaven, a people who live continually under the law. God's righteousness and faithfulness under the law is shown in his relationship with the angels; his love, mercy, and grace under the spirit is perfected in his bride, the elect of mankind.

God's relationship with man is one of unmerited and undeserved love. A process required God reaching down and lifting us up unto himself, making us more like him. Man moves from a position of sin to salvation, through our decision to choose and accept Christ as our Lord. Thus man's position with God is one of choice unto ascension through God's love. Man is also free to reject God and receive the consequences thereof. Angels were created in their exalted position. The difference is that they are created to serve God. In the master/servant relationship their freedom is to choose to reject the commandment of God and to receive the judgment associated with that choice, without the element of grace.

Just as Satan used pride to cause Eve to sin, Satan put the seed of jealousy and bitterness within the heart of the fallen angels as he used the disclosed plan (desire) of God toward his creation 'man' to have a special relation with him from that of the Angels. Satan convinced one-third of the angels to follow him when he convinced them they were entitled to a higher position than what God had established for them under his plan.

... Are [Angels] not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation. [Heb. 1: 14]

The angels view of their relationship to man is that of fellow servants and brethren. That description is entirely accurate in our current status and relationship to God and each other. We are the servants of God and we are brethren of the angels in that each of us shares the same image from the same source, the Lord. The primary difference is that man's relationship to God through Christ is that of development and progression. It doth not yet appear what we shall be. The angels own relationship with God is static or non-changing in regards to their own corporate relationship with the Lord.

Angels will share access to God in heaven along with man; they will be present at the very gate of the new heaven. Only those who are written in the Book of Life may enter heaven. The Bible states that nothing which defiles will enter there. The exact nature of their relationship with man is not defined or stated especially as relates to the new heaven and new earth. One thing that is known is that the saints will judge the angels. Man in his glorified body will be equivalent to that of the angels; still the exact nature of the relationship between man and angels in the new heaven and earth is one of those revelations yet to be made known.

New heaven/New earth

Everything which has occurred up to this point was for a specific plan and purpose in the will of God. God knew each of us before we were born. He separated out for himself an elect people; separated from the world; called to himself. When we stand in heaven in our new capacity with Christ it will not be because of who we were and what we had accomplished in this life. We will each and every one stand on the grace of God who made us new creatures; part of his body, the church, all through Christ Jesus our Lord. This present heaven and earth are all for the purpose of leading us into the new heaven and new earth. The new like the old is also created for the glory and honor of the eternal God. The One who was, who is, and who is to come, the Almighty.

In the new earth God desires us to fulfill his purpose, to show forth his righteousness, judgment, mercy and love. We are God's peculiar people we will be glorified with him and shall act as his kings and priests to all his creation. New heaven (Jerusalem) will be our place of abode and fellowship with our Lord. We will bring the honor of the nations unto God. There we will offer sacrifices of praise unto God. The New earth is where we will rule and reign with Christ.

... Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. [I Cor. 2: 9]

To an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you. [I Peter 1: 4]

Behold I create new heavens and new earth, and the former shall not be remembered nor come to mind. [Isa. 65: 17]

As the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me... [Isa. 66: 22]

The earth and heavens which we know today are not forever. Just as the earth passed away through the flood and everything associated therewith, besides Noah and his family, so will this present earth and heaven. After the flood God promised never to destroy the earth again by water (a flood) he never said the world would not pass away. The second time it shall be by fire. What God does say is that the new heaven and new earth will remain. Once this time and place has served its God ordained purpose then it will pass away and everything physically connected therewith.

..earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all those things shall be dissolved... wherein the havens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the . the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with a fervent heat, the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless, we according to his promise look for new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. [II Peter 3: 10-13]

In the new heaven and earth, God will be totally magnified and exalted in his righteousness. Sin totally corrupted this present earth and heavens. In the new creation there will be no defilement of the present world and the current corruption of sin. To accomplish this renewing which is required by a perfect and holy God, then all knowledge of this present world will be taken away. Our 'knowledge' will come from the direct revelation/communion with God. We must realize that because of sin all the knowledge of this world is corrupted. In the new earth God will be able to give us perfect understanding and knowledge. You can look at science. It is an attempt whereby through observation, study, trial and error we have gained knowledge of God's established laws and the universe. We can learn directly from the Creator instead of by trial and error trying to discover what he intended, we will have full access to him and full understanding. The same relationship will apply to all the areas of knowledge and endeavor, whether that be music, art, law, economics, and government.

Charity [Love/God] never faileth, but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away... For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part but then shall I know even as also I am known. [I Cor.13: 8-12]

But if the ministration of death written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses.. Which glory was to be done away... for if that which is done away is glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious. [II Cor. 3: 9-11]

Some of the things we will "loose" are things if it were possible many of us would gladly give up today. Taking away our remembrance of this earth will take away the pain and regret which hangs over many people. This will include not remembering those who were lost that we know in this present world, but we will also not remember those instances in our life that bring us pain and sorrow and burden our minds today. That can be prior sins and heartaches (personal and business failures for example) we have experienced. The previous discussion of Judgment stated that one of the main areas of judgment on the sinner will come from living eternally with the memories and condemnation brought on by sins committed, and opportunities lost in their relationship with God in this life. This is part of the "condemnation" of remembrance of this present world. God's mercy and grace will deliver the child of God from this same burden which binds us even today in our personal walk and relationship with God. These chains of remorse and regret will not follow us into the new heaven and new earth.

..earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all those things shall be dissolved... wherein the havens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the . the heavens shall pass away with a great

noise, and the elements shall melt with a fervent heat, the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless, we according to his promise look for new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. [II Peter 3: 10-13]

Thou Lord, in the beginning hath laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thine hands; they shall perish, but thou remainest, and they shall wax old as a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed, but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail. [Heb. 1: 10-12] see also Isa. 51: 6. Ps. 102: 25-28.

God shall wipe away their tears... here shall be no more death.. Sorrow... crying... pain.. [Rev. 21: 4]

... thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. [Isa. 54: 4]

Even though we will lose “masterpieces” in terms of this present world (art, music, etc...) in all their beauty to God they are nothing, and we will not remember what we have “lost”. From our point of view and perspective today we may not see how this is possible. How can we leave the knowledge which we have worked so hard to accumulate as a people? The tower of Babel itself stands for a very similar proposition. Some of us put great value and worth upon certain books, music, and even areas of knowledge which have affected our lives and it is difficult to see letting go of them and how a society could function without them. But we have developed to where we are even today after losing vast amounts of art, music, literature and knowledge. Prior to the flood there is basically no history of what types of society existed before that time. The pre-flood period lasted about two thousand years, or as long as the time of the birth of Christ until today. During that “lost age” there is no reason to think they did not produce their own masterpieces in regards to the arts, science, and philosophy. Yet today that loss is not the source of constant lamentation since we do not remember what those losses consisted of. We take pride and accomplishment in our own achievements and building on them. The new heaven and earth will be the same. We will develop knowledge in all these areas and our own works will take the place of those which are lost, but in the fullness of time; the things of this world will be missed just as much as all that which was destroyed by the flood. Looking back from the perspective of what we will have achieved through our new relationship with our living savior, then viewing the “masterpieces” of this world will look to us as it does now to God as being of no importance at all.

“God knoweth your hearts, for that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.” [see Luke 16: 15] The only things that have any true value and importance are those things which we accomplish for God, our prayers, our songs, our striving to understand God and his purposes and plans for us as his creation. The things of God are eternal. Those are the things that we will carry over with us from this world into the perfect and eternal. God’s Word abides forever. That will be the basis that God will build off of in our new relationships with him, in the context of his plan and

purpose for us in the new heaven and earth. See related discussion of Rewards in Heaven.

And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail. [Luke 16: 17] Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. [Luke 21: 33] See also Mat. 24: 35.

Even though the things of this world, and our remembrance of those specific things, will pass away; who we are as individuals in this world will remain. The purpose God called us and saved us is because he loved each one of us for who we are. Each of our personalities and attitudes are unique and different one from another, just as each star in heaven is unique and each of us will be unique in our glorified bodies so also we will be unique in our personality and character which we have been given and developed through our life in this world. The personality and character which we take with us into the new earth will be that which we have cultivated in this life. Continuing in the new earth we will be able to develop and grow more like Christ just as we continue to do today in this earth. What we each will continue to possess in the new heaven and earth just as we have in this world is the “Freedom to Choose”. God’s will, desire, and ambition for us in the new heaven and earth, just as in this life, is for us to make the right choices (God receives his greatest joy when he receives our praise from an open heart of love for him, and seek to follow after him and his way through our own free will). God because of his divine love has bound himself to us, his eternal bride.

God’s original plan desire was set forth early in his relationship with Israel through the temple, yet it was not accomplished after the flesh, “I will dwell among the children of Israel, and be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God.... that I may dwell among them; I am the LORD their God.” [Ex. 29: 45-46] In the New Jerusalem, God’s perfect eternal plan will be realized, “Behold the tabernacle of God is with man and he shall dwell with them, they shall be his people, God shall be with them, they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.” [Rev. 21: 3] see also Ezek. 37: 26-28. This is the fulfillment of the O.T. promise through Christ found in Lev. 26: 11-12.. And the LORD spake with Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend... but my face shall not be seen.[Ex. 33: 11, 23] The manner in which GOD spoke to Moses in the Temple is an example of the foreshadowing of the Lord’s intent and desire for communion eternally with his bride; however, even in the temple God did not commune with Moses face to face. The veil (of revelation) of God’s face (identity) was not yet lifted according to God’s divine plan. See II Cor. 3: 13-18. In the New Jerusalem we will see the face of our Savior and he will speak to him as unto a friend.

For [Abraham] looked for a city, which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God.... such a country... prepared for them a city... [Heb. 11: 10-16]

The divinely ordained relationship which God desires to have with his creation will find its ultimate fulfillment in the new heaven and new earth. The three spheres of

relations between God and man is individual or bodily, the family, and finally government. The first sphere is that of the individual or bodily. When we are saved, the salvation experience is completely personal, as we open our hearts in faith and love accepting Christ as Savior. In response, Christ's spirit comes into our heart and mind and makes us a new creature. Finally the church itself is constantly described as the body of Christ, which is itself the body of God in the flesh. In the new creation, Christ is the head of the body and we are the members which fitly framed together make the body perfect. Secondly, the sphere of the family is also used to describe the saints and Christ in the New Jerusalem, as we abide with Christ there we are again described as his bride; and the bride and groom together are again one body. In other places we are given other family analogies to our relationship when we are said to be heirs and joint-heirs with Christ Jesus in glory. Lastly, in the sphere of government the role of the saints of the Lord is consistently described as being kings and priests. God in his character is predicated upon righteousness, judgment, and grace. God's plan and desire relating to the new creation is to allow God's glory to shine forth in each of these different areas of government, related to the nations and people his bride is given authority over.

All too often when we hear descriptions of heaven it is most often filled with pictures of angels and the saints wearing towels or robes sitting in the clouds playing harps and spending all our time eating fruit. There will in fact be a time and place for all those activities in heaven yet to think that is the type of relationship in an eternal sense which God plans and desires for his relations with his people is a gross misunderstanding of the very essence of God's character.

When we discuss the new creation God has made for his bride to live in, we must make a distinction between the New Jerusalem (Heaven) and the new earth. The new heaven will be a much more vibrant and energetic and even demanding environment than what many people expect. The New Jerusalem will be the center of all the new creation, just as the temple was the center of all religious, social and political life in Israel. The New Jerusalem will be the literal temple in the new earth. This will be the area of true communion between Christ and his bride, both individually and as part of his overall body. We will meet together to worship God and bring honor and praise to him in this place; we will also meet to reason together with Christ as our heavenly Father (personally) but also as the King of kings (governmentally) and as High Priest (religiously). The New Jerusalem will also be the focus of where we fellowship and reason together as various members of Christ's greater body, we will be a literal nation of kings ourselves, and the New Jerusalem will be where we commune together equally before Christ.

There will be a great deal of order and protocol in the New Jerusalem because it will be the place where Christ himself resides and places his glory. Everything which God does in regards to his temple is highly structured. God through Christ will be gloried through the ceremonies in the New Jerusalem just as he was in the original temple sacrifice. However what we will offer to God within the New Jerusalem will be sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving; and offerings of righteousness and holiness. God is a god of order, and this will be manifest in the operations of his city. We will come to his

city to bring the honor of the nations to his throne, various special feasts will be kept in the New Jerusalem similar to how it was in Israel, such as the Feast of Passover, Tabernacle, and New Moons according to the manner which Christ himself will tell us.

The New Jerusalem in the midst of all that glory, and pomp and pageantry will also be the source of our greatest peace and joy as Christ's bride. Within its walls we will have a peace and assurance that only comes in abiding in the presence of our Redeemer. There will be no sorrow there, no fear, no doubt. Within its walls there will be indeed the truest abundance of love and blessings not just for those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life but for all the people and nations. All blessings for all people both literally and proverbially will flow from the throne of God.

Nations of them which are saved shall walk in light of it. Kings of the earth do bring their glory honor into it... they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations unto it... there shall no wise enter into it any thing that defiles,... but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life. [Rev. 21: 23-27] see also I Peter 2: 9

I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people. In the courts of the LORD's house. In the midst of thee, O Jerusalem, Praise ye the LORD. [Ps. 116: 17-19]

They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life; in thy light shall we see light. [Ps. 36: 8-9] Out of the Throne of God cometh river of water of Life, tree of life the leaves for the healing of the nations. Rev. 22: 1-2 see also Rev. 2: 7. also Isa. 33: 20-24. Contrast with Kingdom Age - sanctuary, trees, and river. Ezek 47; Joel 3: 18; Zech. 14: 8; Ps. 46: 4. Even going back to Genesis in the garden (sanctuary - God communed with Adam) there was a river running through it, and also the tree of life was present.

We have discussed how the Bible shows a progression of revelation and majesty throughout scripture beginning in the flesh and maturing into the spirit. See the earlier discussion of the revelation and progression relating the temple itself. A similar development occurs in regards to the river and the tree of life. Going back to the initial description of the Garden of Eden there is a river which runs through it and the tree of life is present there. Later when the Kingdom Age is described and Jerusalem during that time, a river is described as coming out of the temple from the throne of the King, its purpose is for the healing of the waters. Next to the river there is a tree of life which has the purpose of the healing of men. Finally in the New Jerusalem there is a river which flows from the throne of God, living waters; and next to the river there are trees of life, each bearing fruit in their season, and which bring healing to the nations.

It is important to understand and realize the importance of from where this river springs and where the tree of life is located. Both these are focused on the throne of God. All life and all blessings come from God, and it is God who is worthy of all our praise and glory for the blessings which he provides. The water flows out naturally from the throne, and its natural course takes it to the world and the inhabitants outside the city reap the natural benefits which flow from God. The tree of life however and the fruits which it bears is different. The fruits which it bears are intended for the healing of the nations. Yet the Bible makes clear that only those whose names are written in the Book of Life can enter the New Jerusalem and thereby have access to the fruits of the tree. Thus the only way the fruits will ever benefit the nations will be if someone, namely ourselves, take the fruits to them. In this respect the trees and their fruit around the river of life is like the gospel. The fruit is of no benefit, except it is delivered to those in need who can benefit therefrom. Just as in this life God has chosen men, specifically preachers, to bring the Word to those in need; similarly in heaven God will place the burden on his saints to take the fruit from the trees and deliver them to those in need, namely the nations over which we will be given responsibility for. As Priests as well as kings, we will spread the blessings of God to the nations in the form of the fruit from the trees, as well as bringing the honor of the nations and present them before God in praise in the Holy City. As kings we will have to bring righteousness and judgment to the nations, and the fruit derived will be peace and joy. As priests we bring the sacrifices of the nations unto God in the New Jerusalem, we act as intercessors for the needs of the people, and we will teach them the law and to love the word of the Lord.

One other unique aspect of the New Jerusalem, which was discussed much earlier, is the nature of the cloud which covers the city. The cloud is a constant feature throughout scripture and is intimately associated with the glory and presence of God himself. When the children of Israel came out of Egypt, they were lead by a pillar of fire by night and a cloud in the day. The tabernacle in the wilderness was covered by a cloud and a pillar of fire. At the time of the transfiguration of Christ, there was an overshadowing cloud present. During the Kingdom Age, Jerusalem will be covered by a cloud, and there will be light to the city from the cloud and not the sun during this period. Thus all through scripture where the manifest and direct communion between God in his most direct presence with man is exhibited there is always a cloud and there is always light.

Wherever God chooses in all his glory and presence to directly interact with man the cloud and light without need of the sun are present. The cloud represents the truest aspect of the existence of God in his omnipresence; a cloud is the most obvious display of presence without tangible physical substance. The cloud stands as a constant testimony of God being equally present at all location at all time. Whenever God takes a form whether the glorified image of the Father in Heaven, or Christ in the flesh on earth, and finally Christ in his glorified image in heaven there will always be the tendency for creation to think and equate themselves with God. Satan did this and it was the beginning of his eventual fall. We should never confuse the fact that God takes a form for the sake of greater and more direct communion with his creation; with the misapprehension that God is in any way limited by that image itself.

There will be no sun for the Lord giveth light.. And they shall reign for ever and ever. [Rev. 22: 5]

... behold a bright cloud overshadowed them... [Mat. 17: 5] God's presence/glory is represented by a cloud overshadowing his sanctuary. See Ex. 40: 38; Isa 4: 5-6; Isa. 24: 23.

Many believe that there will be no sun in the new heaven and new earth. This may in fact be the case, but scripture never specifically states this fact. What it does say is that the nations shall receive light from the New Jerusalem, and that the inhabitants thereof will never feel the heat of the sun again, and that the Lamb will be the light. As just shown all through scripture there is a natural light which accompanies the cloud of the presence of God. Yet this general light did not cause the sun or moon themselves to cease to exist, they were just irrelevant in the presence of God, The Lord promises one group that they will no longer have to feel the heat of the sun. This is the promise to those martyred for Christ. This promise never appears to be universal in nature. The special status of martyrs will be discussed further a little later. But the light and the overshadowing cloud will be one more of the manifestations by God of his majesty and the honor he places upon his Holy City in the new earth. The people of the new earth who can not enter into the city will marvel at God's majesty just as the gentile nations during the Kingdom Age will marvel at Jerusalem and the temple wherein the King will rule and reign in the earth for a thousand years.

We will reign as kings and priests with Christ in the new earth. When the Bible describes Adam it says that God gave him dominion over his creation (plants and animals). When the Bible refers to the saints relationship it refers to us as priests and as ruling and reigning with Christ. The scripture indicate there will be some form of existence of higher creation (such as what we are now) Just as the angels are made in the image of God yet bear a different relationship to God than what mankind does, so likely will this next earth have similar inhabitants. All this is totally within God's own divine prerogative and discretion to establish. The Bible does mention nations and kings being present on the new earth. Compare Christ as our example in the Kingdom Age, see Zech 6: 13 (as King and Priest). See also Jer. 33: 15-18.

... hast made us unto our God, kings and priests, and well shall reign on the earth. [Rev. 5:10] see also Dan 7: 18, 27; Rom. 8: 17; II Tim. 2: 12; I Peter 2: 9; Rev. 1: 6.

Then the priests and the Levites arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven. [II Chron. 30: 27]

It could be argued that priests and kings merely refers to our relationship with Christ and being part of his eternal kingdom and eternally worshiping him and our communion with him, but this alone does not alone define the parameters of what God

desires for his chosen people in their new existence. Nowhere in the scriptures does it indicate that children of a king themselves are given dominion and rule over their own brothers (and sisters). The Bible does indicate that rewards will be passed out differentiating between believers based on God's grace and our fruits and how good of stewards we are of God's gifts in this life. The parable of the Three Stewards indicate that based on how each managed what they were given that they each would be rewarded with greater or lesser kingdoms to rule over. Not every member of the bride of Christ will be of equal glory in the future kingdom, some will be exalted above others, yet still before God each of us will still be equally his bride, and he will love each one the same. The Bible states we will dwell in the Father's house, in our own mansion, and eat with him at his table, the marriage supper of the Lamb. Dwelling in the Father's house and eating at his table one brother will not rule over another, the Father (Bridegroom) rules over all and loves all equally. Outside of the New Jerusalem there can and will likely be variances in what the Father gives each of his children charge over, both greater and lesser kingdoms.

Even in the new earth there will be room for change based on our individual attitudes and motivation. Even once God has dispersed his rewards (kingdoms) in heaven there still will be changes, increases, and decreases over time based on each of our individual choices. When the Lord divided the land of Cannon to the tribes of Israel there were certain adjustments made, even once the land was divided by lot. The children of Manasseh desired even more land than they were given and were told to go out and take for themselves if they desired it from a certain area and people. See Josh 17: 12-18. It is interesting that even in the land they were given they failed to follow God's command to drive out all the inhabitants of the land. Second example, an additional portion was given to Simeon out of the tribe of Judah because Judah's portion was too much for them. See Josh 19: 1, 9. It is possible if we are not good stewards of what God gives us in the new earth, he can give it to another. It is of interest to note the tribe of Dan also desired greater land and went out and possessed it, yet just a while later the tribe of Dan was itself pushed back and forced to flee to the mountains. See Josh 19: 47 and Judges 1: 34.

Scripture never indicates that one believer will be a "king" over others who are themselves saved by the grace of God. In fact if anything the person who would be a "king" would have the spirit and actions of a "servant" The other option would be that we will all be kings without any kingdom or people to reign over, and priests without any people to act as the intercessor for, other than ourselves. In heaven and in God's eyes we are all brethren and are treated as such. See Mat 23: 8. Within the organization/hierarchy of Heaven and in the rewards or kingdoms some will be exalted and will be chief among their brethren even those will have the spirit of a servant. See Mat 20: 25-28 and Mat 23: 12.

We will all, with certain possible exception, be given kingdom(s) some greater some lesser but we each will act as kings and priests. As part of the Bride of Christ part of our relationship will be to help and support each other to bring forth a perfect world with different kingdoms and "kings" yet we will all be part of the same body (of Christ)

and will be able to support each other like different members of the same body some have different strengths and abilities that other parts of the body may not and to support all the body fitly framed together. Christ will desire us to be of service to each other's kingdoms (not necessarily our own) and thereby to the other members of the body of Christ. Since we are to learn all things (knowledge) anew we will be needing the experience and expertise of different members of our brothers (fellow kings) to develop in various aspects of our own kingdoms we will learn from each other, our kingdoms will learn from other kingdoms, not war and steal like in this present world. See Micah 4: 3-5.

I mention "with certain possible exception" relating to the LORD giving each of his bride kingdom(s), because God does give us a general roadmap of his divine heavenly structure through how he designed his kingdom (through Israel) on earth. Historic Israel and also in the Kingdom Age (See Ezek. 44: 28) one group was not given a specific inheritance of land. That is the tribe of Levi the people God specifically selected as priests to minister unto him. Revelation mentions that God will take those who have given their lives as martyrs, and washed their robes in his blood, as a people whom he will keep unto himself and feed them and that no heat shall be upon them, and that they will minister unto him continually. This group will serve the role and positions of the Levites of the Old Testament, and also in the Kingdom Age, God keeps a select group to continually minister unto him in praise and worship out of a willing and loving heart. This group through their sacrifice will be the only group whose works will vindicate them in the presence of the Most High. See also Num. 1: 49-50, 53; and Num. 3: 12-13, 45; Num 18: 20-21; Duet. 10: 9.

Additionally part of our new heavenly communion with Christ face to face, will be that God desires to reason together with his beloved. He desires us to bring our problems and together to make righteous and wise judgments as issues arise. All throughout the Bible it is shown that God's desire for his creation and for us as his bride to demonstrate righteousness and judgment. Thus the new earth will give God and his chosen people the opportunity to commune together and to learn from Christ those issues that of primary importance with our Lord.

Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow, come now, let us reason together, saith the LORD... [Isa. 1: 17-18]

The New Jerusalem will be God's temple full of glory but also full of holiness and righteousness. Just because there is a new earth will not mean it will be eternally without sin. In fact anytime there is creation who are given the freedom of self-will (choice) then there will be sin present unfortunately. The Bible only says that the New Jerusalem will be free from sin, that no whoremonger will enter in; only those whose names are written in the Lambs book of life. Outside that city there is wickedness I do not believe this is merely referring to the possibility that hell might be located in the new earth but outside the new eternal city of God. Ezek. 43: 21 describes the sin offering burned outside the temple in the Kingdom Age. See also Isa. 66: 24.

During the Kingdom Age God will set forth his perfect example for how we are to serve as kings in exercising that authority. He will give us the perfect pattern in this world. The new earth gives us the opportunity/responsibility as his kings and priests among those nations. During the Kingdom Age Christ will rule with a rod of iron, it never says that there will not be sin even during the millennium. When sin does arise however Christ as king will bring judgment upon it swiftly, and not allow it to affect others or proliferate. By bringing judgment quickly, this shows the greatest love because it allows righteousness to flourish and also peace, truth, and joy along with it. As kings we will be charged with setting up the mechanisms of government, and ensure that righteousness is allowed to function and is exalted. We will teach our kingdoms the law, and then make sure that it is executed faithfully; and with a spirit of love for the law, which is the Word of God.

... faithful wise servant, whom the lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant... shall be found so doing... [the Lord] shall make him ruler over all his goods. [Mat 24: 45-47] See Ezek. 34: 4,16, we are obligated to strengthen the diseased; heal those that are sick; bind up the broken, bring again that which is driven away; seek out that which is lost... rule with righteousness, mercy and love.

... set magistrates and judges which may judge all the people that are beyond the river all such as know the laws of thy God, and teach ye them that know them not. And whomsoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the King, let judgment be executed speedily upon him... [Ezra 7: 25-26]

Defend the poor and the fatherless; do justice to the affected and needy. Deliver the poor and needy; rid them out of the hand of the wicked. [Ps. 82: 3-4]

The O.T. specifically set forth the procedure and location where all sacrifices were to be brought. "... bring [the sacrifice personally] not unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, to offer an offering unto the LORD... that man shall be cut off from among the people... [must bring their offering to the door of the tabernacle] unto the priest [who makes the sacrifice for them]." [see Lev. 17: 3-5] In the new earth as Christ's priests we will bring the honor praise (sacrifices) of the nations before God. There will be order in the worship of God in the new heaven and earth just as there was, and will be again, in this world. Unlike the current established order of worship under the law, requiring the shedding of blood, there will not be sacrifice in the New Jerusalem. The entire world, and all the nations, will look towards the majesty of God's holy city. As priests we will be the emissaries between God and the nations.

The people which we will be kings and priests over will have the opportunity for sin that we had in the Garden of Eden here on earth. Some will choose sin in the new

earth, though without Satan or some similarly singularly powerful force for evil the nature and extent of sin will likely be much more limited generally than what we experience here on earth. None of the inhabitants of this new earth will be holy and because of that they will not be able to enter into the New Jerusalem, which is God's temple. As priests, God desires that we will teach this new people the righteousness of God, teach them his law, and bring them into his paths of righteousness. We will bring the honor of the nations for whom we are priests unto the LORD in the New Jerusalem. As kings we show forth the judgment of God; as Priests we point the people towards the heartfelt love and worship of God; in both of these spheres the righteousness of God is to be exalted among the people.

Another aspect of the new earth is that it will be full of diversity, just as each of us will be unique and individual in our glorified bodies' appearance. Likewise, each of us will have the opportunity of uniqueness in the functioning of our individual kingdoms to which we serve as kings and priests. God desires and will guide each of us in a personal development and as we fulfill our new roles and will show us what his will is if we ask, but he will give us freedom in the future just as he does in this earth, for better or worse. Just as there is an infinite variety of personalities and attitudes within the Church body on this earth the same will exist in heaven. God loves each of us with our individual strengths and also our weaknesses what he desires is to work with us and to make us more perfect throughout eternity, but he will never force the change upon us. The Bible says we will have glorified bodies, it never does say we will have glorified attitudes. God is completely perfect, all of his ways are perfect, and there is no variance in him. The same can not be said for ourselves. We will enter heaven because of Christ's perfection and through accepting him as our savior not because of our worthiness or our works. That same aspect of our individual weakness won't disappear because we enter the New Jerusalem. As we go into eternity, God will be glorified because he will continue to reach forth his hand of love and grace unto us, all throughout eternity as the situation calls for. Even in our weakness and incorrect decisions God's perfect righteousness and judgment will be exalted, in our success and sometimes in our failure.

O continue thy lovingkindness unto them that know thee; and thy righteousness to the upright in heart. [Ps. 36: 10]

The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me; thy mercy, O LORD, endureth for ever; forsake not the works of thine own hands. [Ps. 138: 8]

The same fruits of the spirit and righteousness which God desires for us to develop in this life will be necessary in the world to come, as we work together as parts of God's kingdom. There will be different approaches to governing our various kingdoms, in regards to economic, legal, and societal justice issues; and even in the specific application of religious questions regarding sin and righteousness. Different kings and kingdoms will come to what appears to be varying decisions in many of these and related issues. Just as God desires our relationship in heaven as one of fellowship, love and communion where we can reason together and learn directly from Christ, he also desires us to fellowship and commune together as individual members of his body

and to come to New Jerusalem to work out our differences and difficulties in a spirit of love. Just as there are mechanisms set forth for how disagreements are handled in the church the same will be present in the future kingdom of God. We will be encouraged to bring our disagreements to our brother first privately and work it out, if that is unsuccessful then bring it in the presence of two or three witness; and if there still in no resolution to bring the issue before the entire body of Christ. The one requirement is that as children of the same heavenly Father, we are directed not to lay hands on our brother. In fact, we are to suffer ourselves to be defrauded rather than to exceed the scope set forth for handling disagreements within the body. As a final resort we are commanded to exclude that member of the body who refuses correction from the overall body. Physical chastisement is reserved to the providence of Christ alone as King of kings and heavenly father.

Even in this life and in our own church there will be those whom we prefer, who correspond closer to our own attitude and beliefs on certain subjects, and who our personalities work better with than others. By the same respect, there are those we never seem to make a close personal contact, for whatever reason. This natural sifting will continue in the new earth. We are commanded to love our brother and we all do that, even when we may not necessarily like a specific individual. These natural differences will become even more evident in the new earth and the operation of different kingdoms. Where in this life our choices in our life, our political preferences, philosophies, and finally how our conscience guides us in the application of scripture, are primarily personal in nature; in the new earth we will apply these principles in public related to our individual kingdoms. When someone disagrees with us in what we feel is “right” even in such relatively small matters as politics and philosophy, especially when compared to spiritual matters, we can become defensive. We will also be called to act as Priests and in this area we will be called to make decisions on how the spiritual and moral affairs of our individual kingdoms operate. This will be the area which offense within the kingdom of God between its members will have the highest potential for conflict. Within the church it is the matter of what is “sin” which causes the most severe disagreements and strain within the church body. See earlier discussion of Believer’s Thoughts and Attitudes. What we must remember is that each of us is equally saved by the grace of God. Each of us will have had our names written within that same Book of Life, even though we had different approaches in our conscience relating to doubtful things in this life. God desires diversity in the operation of his kingdom and receives glory from that very diversity. We will be called upon to manifest the fruits of the spirit of love, humbleness, meekness, and charity to those whom we may not agree with. In similar respect we are to show love the same spirit to those whom we know may not agree with our own decision regarding the operation of our kingdom. The fact that individual kingdoms with vastly different approaches to the application of both kingly and priestly offices, can still work together, support each other, and respect one another, is what will truly glorify God in his eternal kingdom. It will be Christ himself who will bind us together.

Our minds can not comprehend what exactly God desires to show us in our new relationship in the new heaven and new earth, the beauty the majesty the awe that we will experience with our Lord and Savior and King. God takes pride in showing forth his

magnificence, his glory, his power and all his mighty righteousness and authority and deliverance. God gave Adam limited responsibility in the beginning of just naming animals and then commanding him to bring the world under subjection. God intends to start us out as kings and priest in the new earth. Nothing says this by itself is also his final end plan for his elect. God's glory will be eternal and without limit or end. In this present world we dream of seeing new planets and new worlds. He does not put more upon us that what we are able to bear, but will develop and strengthen us so that we can bear more. Very likely the new earth will likewise be just a beginning point for God's greater yet unrevealed plans for his people. God took Israel and desired to bring them into a new land to fulfill his promise to Abraham but also to show forth his power and majesty to his chosen people. God loves to show his majesty and strength and in the new heaven he will provide even greater evidence of that preeminence than what he has ever shown forth or will show forth according to scriptures in this world. In these new heavens there will be some further creation that God will show forth himself in judgment and use us to bring forth his righteousness; as the people of Israel did in the Promised Land except in even greater more cosmic proportions. How we deal with each other will be a testimony to the dominions, principalities, and powers which will exist outside the kingdom of God in the new earth.

And ye shall not walk in the manner of the nations which I cast out before you; for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them. But I said unto you. Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, and land that floweth with milk and honey; I am the LORD your God which have separated you from other people.. Ye shall be holy unto me; for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine. [Lev. 20: 23, 26]

... Thou crowned him with glory, and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hands; Thou hast put all things in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. [Heb. 2: 7-8]

For by him were all things created that are in heaven and earth visible and invisible whether they be thrones, or dominions or principalities or powers, all things were created by him and for him. [Col. 1: 16]

Which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him on 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 that which is to come. [Eph. 1: 21] Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages world without end. [Eph. 3: 21]

One thing the Bible teaches over and over again, are these same basic principles and themes. They are the elements of God's righteousness, his judgment, and his grace. The only things that changes are the degree of our understanding and God's revelation of

those elements of his character to us. God will continue to find ways to impress us with his majesty, his strength, his delivering hand, and also his love towards his bride. Faith will continue to be important to God and he will not cease his process of drawing us closer to himself; and he will continue to find ways to test us and strengthen our spirit and attitude; and chastise us when that is necessary, even as a father does the son that he loves. Regardless of what we encounter in the new creation our hope and confidence will remain sure as long as we keep our eyes and hearts centered upon the one true and living God. Just as God has promised and will fulfill his promises in this world; so he also will in the next. He will be glorified and magnified before all creation as represented by the principalities and powers to come, the world without end. The new heaven and new earth will continue to bear witness to God's proclamation, first set forth in scripture so long ago, namely, "... the LORD thy God is One."