

Children of Light

A Devotional for Bereans

Vol. 3

"The Bereans...received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."
(Acts 17:11)



Berean Lamp Ministries

Volume 3: Berean Lamp Ministry Devotional Series



Cover Art: A representation of the ten virgins who Jesus used to illustrate our preparedness (or not) for His Second Coming. The five virgins with lit lamps perhaps represent sincere Believers who not only hold lamps in their hands (an outward show of faith), but which actually have oil/light/fire in them (perhaps representing the Holy Spirit). The five foolish virgins outwardly looked genuine, but they didn't have oil/light/fire in their lamps, because they were not true Believers and were unprepared for the spiritual darkness that overtook them and could not go with the Lord when He came. *"Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the prudent answered, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour"* (Matthew 25:1-13). May we be sincere in our profession of the Faith like the five wise virgins and so be prepared for Jesus' return in the spiritual darkness of these Last Days! Even so, Amen.



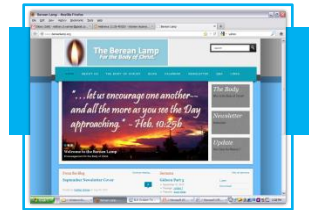
Berean Lamp Ministries

"To encourage one another – and all the more as you see the day approaching." (Hebrews 10:25b)

Berean Lamp Ministries seeks to:

1. Encourage and strengthen the Body of Christ by providing the means for each of its members to share their spiritual gifts with one another, rooted in the Word of God, thereby growing into deeper union with one another and with Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).
2. Minister to non-believers; be a witness for Christ and a testimony to His Body in the world.

Berean Lamp Ministries is a place for the body of Christ to come for encouragement and spiritual sustenance in the face of our swiftly changing world that is rapidly abandoning God. We would appreciate your help in spreading the work of this ministry. Thank you, and God bless. - **Pastor Scott Moller**



Explore more devotionals, articles, sermons, and music from the Body of Christ—also sign up for the bi-monthly Newsletter and learn more about the Berean Christian Fellowship and its ministry, the Berean Lamp—by visiting us at:

www.bereanlamp.org

We would like to give thanks to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for this opportunity to share in His ministry to His saints – all glory and honor and praise be to Him who purchased us from our debt to sin by the shedding of His blood and saved us for the resurrection to Life when He conquered death and hell by His resurrection.

We would also like to thank our generous Body, who have supplied all the photographs in this devotional. Their hard work and dedication in sharing their gifts have made this ministry possible.

We pray that this work ministers to your heart and encourages you in your walk. Let's all take time to be in God's Word together.

*All devotionals written by Nathan Warner
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Suffering Temptations with Jesus

“And if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*” (Romans 8:17).

How does the Believer suffer with Jesus? Oftentimes we feel guilt because our lives don’t “measure up” to the sorts of suffering that “real” saints endure. How can we compare “common” temptations with the great acts of sacrifice that “heroes” of faith give?

This thinking can make us struggle with guilt over temptation because we are taught it shows weakness and enduring it isn’t “real” suffering. We believe it’s our fault if we struggle with it, and it certainly can’t be compared to being tortured for your faith as a Christian. Yet the writer of Hebrews puts temptation in the midst of some of the worst things endured by Believers, who “*were stoned, they were sawn in two, **they were tempted**, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated*” (Hebrews 11:37).

A huge part of our suffering in life comes through enduring temptations, whether they are to give up, feed bitterness and anger, surrender to peer pressure, become angry at God, compromise the conviction of the Holy Spirit, take things into our own hands, defend ourselves, accuse others, justify ourselves, walk out on our responsibilities, etc. Sometimes it would be easier to move mountains than resist the urge to act on our temptations—they can be as tortuous as any device made by man.

One of Jesus’ great trials was suffering and enduring forty days “*being tempted by the devil*.

*And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry” (Luke 4:2). At the end of these temptations, in Jesus’ mental and physical exhaustion, satan hit Him with three great temptations—things that would have “ended” His mental and physical suffering by ending what God asked Him to endure. Enduring these temptations was no less difficult than anything else Jesus endured, for “He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. **For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted**” (Hebrews 2:17-18). “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16).*

But how do we deal with temptation? Jesus spoke the Word of God to the devil, and He told us to “*keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation*” (Matthew 26:41). Watch over your intimate relationship with Christ by being in His Word and in prayer, speak and relate to Him, include Him in every aspect of your life, as someone who deeply loves you, for He does. Give Him the honor and respect He deserves by confessing the trouble of your heart, and He “*will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it*” (1 Cor. 10:13b), for “*God is faithful, Who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able*” (v13a). We can so easily blame God for what we endure, but Jesus did not, and He endured it for you. Take encouragement in enduring temptation—as a sign that “*we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world*” (1 John 4:17b). Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Suffering Persecution by the Devil

“Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name” (1 Peter 4:16).

We often take this verse to refer to our suffering persecution at the hands of men for our testimony, but what about our suffering directly at the hands of the devil? We so often fail to see his persecution of us in the suffering of our daily lives, but with every difficulty and challenge, satan is there in the midst of it, accusing us, accusing God, and tempting us to take matters into our own hands (in the last Devotional, we saw that temptation is persecution). When we struggle with anxiety, fear, health difficulties, pain, betrayal, conflicts, etc, these are more than physical, mental, or emotional difficulties, because satan wields them as weapons to attack our trust in who God has made us (His Children), our trust in the goodness of our Heavenly Father, and our trust in His will (not our will) to meet our needs. We sometimes say, “Why is this happening? Is something wrong with me? With Him? Do I need to take matters into my own hands?”

Jesus was no stranger to persecution in suffering, for God saw it fitting He *“should make the founder of [our] salvation perfect through suffering”* (Hebrews 2:10), and Isaiah prophesied people would be astonished by Jesus, because *“His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and His form beyond that of the children of mankind”* (Isaiah 52:14). Jesus suffered physically, emotionally, and mentally, *“a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”* (Isaiah 53:3b), for He *“had to be made like His brethren in all things...For since He Himself was tempted in*

that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:17-18). Everything Jesus suffered, whether hunger, pain, rejection, perhaps disease and disfigurement, involved persecution of the acutest kind at the hands of the devil. Consider that when Jesus was in the wilderness, satan used His suffering by hunger as a weapon, attacking His nature (accusing Him), saying, *“if you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread”* (Matthew 4:3b). Satan also took advantage of His emotional weakness, attacking God’s nature, casting doubt as to whether God would (or could) save Him if He jumped off the Temple (planting doubt in God). Finally, the devil used Jesus’ mental exhaustion to attack His trust in God’s will (and plan) by offering a “better deal” - immediate gratification without suffering, only requiring Jesus to act on His own will to “save” Himself.

Jesus’ responded by affirming His trust in the Word of God concerning Himself, saying man shall live *“by every word that comes from the mouth of God”* (Matthew 4:4b) - We too should affirm what Scripture says about us when satan attacks our identity. Jesus also affirmed His trust in what the Word says about God’s nature, that we should not doubt He is Who He is (Matthew 4:7). Finally, Jesus affirmed His trust in God’s will and plan for our lives, for He said, *“I seek not My own will but the will of Him who sent Me”* (John 5:30b).

In like manner, everything that we endure as Believers is suffering for our Faith (aside from the results of sin) because it involves persecution from the devil: *“when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God”* (1 Peter 2:20b).

In His suffering, Jesus lived by the Word of God (trusting His Father’s Word) and withdrew often to pray to His Father by Himself. May we also recognize the devil’s persecution of our faith in what we suffer, looking to Jesus for our response in times of difficulty. Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Why Do We Suffer?

“Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good” (1 Peter 4:19 NASB).

Oftentimes man's first response to suffering is to cry, “Why is this happening? I don't deserve this! This isn't the way it should be!” Christians may tack on, “Why won't God do something about this? How can He allow it?”

All mankind suffers as a consequence of our disobedience in Paradise. At the moment of Adam and Eve's sin, the effects of their rebellion swept into the nature of every created thing. As a result, volcanoes, earthquakes, and violent storms ravage the earth, while disease, injury, and death make God's “good” creation suffer sin's curse. At the same time, sin from within man causes him to injure himself and others emotionally, mentally, and physically. This is creation's “*slavery to corruption*” that makes it “*groan*” and “*suffer*” (Romans 8:21-22) because of man's rebellion.

We made a hopeless mess of life! Yet, God did not abandon us. Through His Son Jesus Christ, God the Father showed His love for us by becoming a sinless man to take responsibility for our rebellion. Jesus willingly paid the requirements God's justice demanded with His death, and because He was also God, He rose from death's clutches incorruptible, taking control of sin and its effects. In doing this, God opened a way for those who acknowledge their sin and accept His Son's substitution for them to be forgiven their debt of rebellion and sin. They are “*born again*” (1 Peter 1:23) and are a “*new creature*” (2 Corinthians 5:17), no longer bearing guilt before God.

While the Believer is a new creation on the inside, their outward flesh is still part of the corrupted world, and the effects of sin still ravage their bodies. How is this any different from a non-believer's situation in the world?

Firstly, a Believer has the future promise that just as their inner man has been changed and “remade” also their outer body will be changed—made “*incorruptible*” (1 Cor 15:52) in the resurrection or the rapture to no longer suffer the effects of sin. This is the blessed hope of our salvation in which Jesus conquered the power of corruption and death over us, to be realized by Believers at the end of this life.

Secondly, God graciously counts the Believer's endurance in faith towards future rewards and crowns in the sinless realms of eternity, for “*without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him*” (Hebrews 11:6), just as Moses considered “*the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward*” (Hebrews 11:26). As Believers, we no longer suffer justly in the world FOR the sin of the world (as unbelievers do). But by enduring, God is storing up treasures for us in Heaven (Matthew 6:20) —If we didn't, there would be no point to the rewards. Thus, the Believer does not suffer in vain, because by enduring the devil's reproach and persecution (directly or at the hands of his inspired men and women) while doing good, we are denying ourselves, taking up our cross (Mark 8:34) and imitating Jesus, Who “*for the suffering of death [is] crowned with glory and honor*” (Hebrews 2:9 NKJV).

When we suffer in life, our first response is to think, “This is pointless.” Satan tried to get Jesus to think this too (Matt 4:8-9), but God's Word says, “*do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward*” (Hebrews 10:35), “*knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord*” (1 Cor 15:28b). Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Do You Trust God with Your Sin?

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9 NASB).

God’s call to the unbelieving world is to *“repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins”* (Acts 2:38a), *“because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed”* (Acts 17:31a).

For those who heed the call of God to repent and put their trust in Jesus, God will cause them to *“be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”* (1 Peter 1:3b), and He will *“cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God”* (Hebrews 9:14b). This is a work that Jesus does in you, to change you, and we have confidence that *“He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 1:6b). It is necessary because *“unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God”* (John 3:3b), *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come”* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

We have been made God’s own possession, for Jesus was *“slain, and purchased for God with [His] blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation”* (Revelation 5:9). We are adopted into God’s family and are sealed by His Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22) to be raised under His discipline to receive a share in Christ’s inheritance when we enter eternity.

But as Believers we still sin. How do we reconcile this, for *“if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment”* (Hebrews 10:26-27a

ESV). This refers to a deliberate state of living in sin (or “practicing sin”—1 John 3:9). Can we who were saved from *“sin still live in it?”* (Romans 6:2b). No. We still sin, but a Believer admits to God that *“when I kept silent about my sin...Your hand was heavy upon me...I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’; And You forgave the guilt of my sin”* (Psalm 32:3-5). David was not “deliberately living” in sin, for when the weight of God’s conviction got through to him, he confessed. To confess is to admit we are wrong and declare God right, but our first reaction when we sin can be to shrink back from confessing it because sin makes us feel bad about ourselves. No one likes feeling bad about themselves, so we try to hide our sin by making excuses, shifting blame, ignoring it—anything to deny it is sin. We don’t want to “lose face” with God or man, but the truth is, we never had a good face to begin with, for it is the righteousness of Jesus that makes us acceptable to God. Therefore, we must confess our sins to Jesus, and those we hurt (James 5:16), and He forgives us.

Do you trust Jesus’ love for you enough to admit your sin to Him without fear of punishment (1 John 4:18), or do you try to make yourself acceptable by turning your “best” face towards Him and others? We want people to see us as we want to be seen, but He sees us as we are, and He wants us to acknowledge the truth about ourselves and the truth about Him. Do not court God’s discipline, but be diligent to confess your sin to Him, admitting He is right. Do not fear punishment, and do not shrink back from confessing, for *“we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul”* (Hebrews 10:39). Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Self-righteous Christians?

“But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God” (Romans 14:10).

Christians as a whole can often be a very judgmental lot, and harsh towards one another. Why do we feel this need to pass judgment on others in self-righteousness, while at the same time taking offense when we are admonished for our behavior by our Brothers in Christ? Wouldn't you expect that we who have acknowledged our sin, depravity, and our hopeless state before God would be humble, patient, gentle, and understanding with one another? Why then do we struggle with this?

Our judgment of others is firmly rooted in the Garden, where man first rebelled against God's judgments and took the role of “judge” upon himself. A judge decides what is good and bad, what is right and wrong, who is guilty and who is innocent. Because of our sin nature, we are constantly passing judgments, whether silently in our minds, in our words, or in our actions. It is second nature to us, and we find comfort looking around us and finding people who we think are worse than we are. It makes us feel better about ourselves, secure in ourselves, and nearer to God when we think we are moving up the “righteousness” chart or forward in the “holiness” game.

But when we measure our position in God's Kingdom by measuring ourselves against our Brothers and Sisters, we're really trying to climb towards God by pushing others down, making them

our “ladder.” We like to think judging others helps us know where we stand, but it is only skin deep, because God and God alone can read the motives of the heart and judge the true nature of reality. For this reason, our judgment does not truly help us understand where we stand in His eyes.

Unfortunately for our pride, there is only one Who has authority to judge and against Whom everyone is measured – Jesus Christ. Against Jesus, you could never “measure up.” And He won't measure you by your times or the people in it. You won't be able to pull “uglier” people next to you when you are before the Judgment Seat of Christ to make yourself “look better” by comparison. It is only in the grace of His mercy that His righteousness covers our ugliness and sin—how fortunate we are in this! He is our salvation—*“not as a result of works, so that no one may boast”* (Ephesians 2:9)! How we love to boast in our judgments! But our salvation is not in reference to anyone, except Jesus Christ, for when God the Father looks at us, He does not see us in comparison to each other, but He sees the blood of His Son making us acceptable to Him.

Therefore, if you are going to be examined by Jesus in Heaven, don't you think you should seek His face to be examined while on earth? Are we too uncomfortable with the thought of His gaze on our hearts to seek His face? Maybe there is unconfessed sin in our lives. Are we quenching His Spirit, ignoring His conviction, and “compensating” by judging others? Maybe we fear losing face by admitting our failings and sin, but before Christ, we have no face—only our naked heart. He gazes now into you, regardless of whether you want Him too. For this reason Jesus advised us: *“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?”* (Matthew 7:1-3) Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Correct, Rebuke, Exhort, Admonish!

“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2).

We are told many times in Scripture to not judge one another. At the same time, we are told to rebuke, correct, exhort, and admonish one another. Is there a difference?

Yes, actually. God is our judge, and He alone has the authority to determine right from wrong, good from evil—what’s more, He has delivered His judgments to us in His Word. When we judge others, we are taking God’s place and determining if something is good or bad based on our feelings, experiences, opinions, first impressions, consciences, etc. This comes from ourselves: “Kate, I don’t approve—it just isn’t right for you to _____.”

But concerning admonishment, Paul tells us that *“all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work”* (2 Timothy 3:16-17), and he instructed us to *“let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God”* (Colossians 3:16), and he says that an Elder *“must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it”* (Titus 1:9).

Do you see the difference? Biblical admonishment comes from the breathed-out

Scriptures, the Word of God dwelling richly in us. It does not come from us, but directly from the Word of God. An example would be: “Yes, Frank, but Jesus said_____, and Paul said that no one who _____ will inherit God’s Kingdom.” When we admonish Biblically, we are not putting ourselves in God’s place, passing judgment on someone from our own feelings, thoughts, choices, backgrounds, consciences, etc. Instead, we are pointing to the authority of God’s judgments in Scripture, because God in His Word has told us what He considers sin.

Now, there can still be some disagreements in how we interpret Scriptures when we admonish or are admonished. This is where we need to seek Scriptural context, the Holy Spirit’s guidance, and the wisdom of our Elders, but the point of admonishment is not to divide by our judgments, but to encourage and restore our Brothers and Sisters to a correct relationship with God by drawing them continually back to the judgments of God in His Word. Jesus told us to *“pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him”* (Luke 17:3): before you rebuke our Brother, seek the conviction of the Spirit and Word regarding your own sin.

Now Paul *“did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears”* (Acts 20:31b), because he wanted Believers to stand firm in the judgments of God’s Word when false teachers would speak *“twisted things”* (Acts 20:29-31). This is why he continually declared the Word: *“the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you”* (Titus 2:11-15). May we too declare God’s Word. Amen.

Thoughts?_____

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Sacrifice vs. Obedience

“Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22b ESV).

We see King Saul here getting a pretty tough message from the Prophet Samuel. Rather than obey God’s Word exactly and follow His full judgments, Saul decided to allow the people to justify their rebellion by clothing it pretty convincingly as work for God.

God had spoken His Word through Samuel: *“Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey”* (1 Samuel 15:3). (It is important context that the Amalekites were intent on destroying Israel). *“But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them”* (1 Samuel 15:9a). When confronted by Samuel as to why they had not destroyed the animals, *“Saul said, ‘They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the LORD your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction’”* (1 Samuel 15:15).

Well, that seems pretty reasonable, doesn’t it? They simply ignored a small point of God’s Word in order to obey God’s “greater” command in His Law for personal sacrifice. Why wouldn’t God be pleased with their show of personal sacrifice? Because He had commanded them to sacrifice their

fleshly appetites and desires to Him in the first place by commanding them to not take any livestock from the enemy. Mankind is an expert at covering “small” sins with “great sacrifice,” but the truth is *“whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all”* (James 2:10). They disobey God in “small” ways in order to “obey” Him in “big” ways—justifying their actions as “spiritual.” After all, weren’t sacrifices a ministry of the people of Israel? Wasn’t it for God? Yes, but a thriving ministry or deep personal cost without an obedient heart that heeds God’s Word, doesn’t mean anything to Him. Sin is sin.

Today, in like manner, many Christians disobey the Word of God by ignoring parts of it, or contending they don’t really mean what they mean. They do this so that they get what they want and “compensate” for it by doing the “greater” good of sacrificing time, money, and energy to Him—justifying their “little” sins by “spiritual” labors. Remember the Pharisees? They had fulltime jobs doing “God’s work,” but they were satisfying their flesh, disobeying God’s Word (Matthew 23:13-28). They clothed their disobedience in public displays of “obedience” to *“outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly...full of hypocrisy and lawlessness”* (Matthew 23:28b). No matter how hard we labor for ministries, how tirelessly we pastor a church, or how inexhaustibly we make converts, none of it delights God if we’re not obedient in our hearts to His Word. If we conceal sin in our lives, He will not accept our sacrifice of time, energy, or good deeds. Rebellion is rebellion.

Do you justify sin in your life? “Oh, it wasn’t that bad!” Do you cover it with sacrifice for God? “He’s really blessed my ministry!” God cares about obedience to Him in our hearts, not the lengths we go to sacrifice to Him. He is not impressed with our efforts or our labors for Him—He does not need our sacrifice—He sacrificed Himself for all! May we obey His Word to us! Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Our Sin is Like Divination

“For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king” (1 Samuel 15:23 ESV).

So often, we see our sin as beginning and ending in us. We don’t always see the invisible spiritual “chemistry” going on in our hearts that inspires our rebellion against God’s Word.

Whether “harmless” lies or unabashed genocide, all is sin against God—rebellion against His Word, which He says *“goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it”* (Isaiah 55:11). Rebellion against God’s Word is just like divination. What does that mean? It comes from the Latin *divinare*, which means “to foresee, **to be inspired by a god.**” Sin is like being inspired by a god—not the One True God, for God does not inspire us to rebellion against Himself. Ultimately, this “god” means satan, who through the first rebellion against God’s Word has inspired rebellions against God ever since. He was the first to put his word over God’s Word, inspiring the rebellion of the King of Babylon with these ancient words: *“I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High”* (Isaiah 14:13-14).

In essence, he was saying, “I will make myself my God, so I can have my own way.” But satan and all self-willed people will be *“brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit”* (Isaiah 14:15), for Jesus is coming *“to execute judgment on all and*

to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way” (Jude 1:15b). Until then, satan remains the false god of this world whose inspiration leads man to rebel against God.

What does “inspiration” mean? It comes from the Latin *inspirare*, which means “breath or blow into.” What we say in our heart or by our mouth is often inspired. But by whom? This is precisely why Job asked Bildad, *“With whose help have you uttered words, and whose breath [spirit] has come out from you?”* (Job 26:4) God’s Word comes by His Holy Spirit to man, for *“it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand”* (Job 32:8) (see also Acts 2:4). The Believer is inspired with God’s breath: *“do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?”* (1 Cor. 3:16).

Similarly, man is also inspired by satan’s spirit to rebel against God, committing all acts of wickedness and self-will, leading to spiritual and physical death. So, when we sin, we are practicing divination in God’s eyes, because we do not seek the inspiration of His Word, but the corrupt and ungodly inspiration of Lucifer, to do for ourselves what we willfully desire (James 1:14).

While the unbelieving world is hopelessly under his influence, the Believer has great hope, because *“we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit Who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God”* (1 Cor. 2:12)—*“all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire”* (2 Peter 1:3b-4). Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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When Jesus Took Your Sins

“At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ‘ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?’ which is translated, ‘MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?’” (Mark 15:34 NASB).

Jesus had never been separated from His Father. He told the Jews, *“I and the Father are one”* (John 10:30), *“He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him”* (John 8:29). But on the cross at the ninth hour, this “oneness” was taken from Jesus, and He was separated from His Father because He took responsibility for my sin and your sin. It was shortly after this that He *“uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last”* (Mark 15:37).

We often stress the pain and suffering Jesus experienced leading up to the cross, and His torture dying on the cross, while failing to stress the greatest pain of all—the moment when He took responsibility before His Father for the sins of the world. As the Hymn puts it, “the deepest stroke that pierced Him was the stroke that justice gave.” The justice of God requires anyone with sin to be separated from His Holy presence, for *“your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear”* (Isaiah 59:2). This dooms every man that has ever lived—past, present, and future, *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23). But in God’s grace, Jesus stepped between us and our doom. He took responsibility for each man’s sins, He stood judged for them in the place of God’s justice, and He received the punishment on Himself—the separation from His Father that every man deserves. Jesus entered death, but because He

was sinless, *“it was impossible for Him to be held in its power”* (Acts 2:24b), and in taking responsibility for sins by His sacrifice, He *“obtained eternal redemption”* (Hebrews 9:12b) for separation from God, and gives it as a free gift to whoever *“believes in His name,”* (John 1:12b). *“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him”* (John 3:36). God’s gift of redemption is not available to people who refuse to turn away from their lives of sin. All Believers still **struggle** with sin (being sanctified in this life), but because we have put our trust in Jesus, *“we confess our sins,”* and *“He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9).

Jesus was not ignorant of the particulars of the sins He took responsibility for— *“He Himself knew what was in man”* (John 2:25b). *“He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him...But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering...Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors”* (Isaiah 53:5-6; 10a; 12b). Do you understand Jesus knows what you’ve done and what you do, even if no one else does? He suffered more than anyone has ever suffered because of it. It is tempting to think our “little” sins aren’t that big of a deal, but their judgment fell on Jesus in order that we might receive God’s pardon. The next time He comes, *“we will all stand before the judgment seat of God”* (Rom. 14:10b). Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Are You Thankful?

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18 ESV).

Many Believers struggle with being thankful. Why? Well, thankfulness denotes gratitude for things you don’t deserve. It is difficult to be thankful for what you have when you feel you deserve it: “I’ve worked hard all my life, and I deserve what I have.” It is equally difficult to be thankful when you feel you deserve something different or better: “I’ve had a tough life, I deserve to be treated well!” Maybe you are thankful to God for what you have, but what if you lost it? It isn’t easy to have a thankful heart when things you rely on, love, or cherish are taken from you.

Ultimately, it’s people’s sense of self-worth, self-esteem, and pride that causes them to think they deserve something. In America, we are raised to believe we are entitled to basic things like “unalienable rights...among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (The Declaration of Independence). We feel entitled to our dignity in the very least and **EXPECT** to inherit an ordinary or good life, with the opportunity to achieve an extraordinary or great one. But the truth is that before God, we don’t deserve any of it. As a sinful and rebellious race, God has said we only deserve His wrath, to be cut off from life and separated from Him, *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23).

Jesus, alone, DID deserve better. He was entitled to the best things, for He was God’s sinless Son, yet in this life *“He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief...He was pierced for our transgressions; He*

was crushed for our iniquities...He poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:3a, 5a, 12b). This is what you and I DO deserve! This is what we are entitled to! Yet in God’s mercy, Jesus stood in our place, taking God’s wrath on Himself—separated from His Father because of us. He bore *“the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors”* (Isaiah 53:12b) in order that we might be saved from what we truly deserve!

If at this moment, you were to stand in the presence of Jesus Christ, you would know that you deserve only punishment. All our self-esteem and self-worth would fall away in the reality of Who He is and what He has done in contrast to who we are and what we deserve. We often aren’t “seeing” Jesus when we go about our business. Our eyes so easily drift from Him, and we spend a great deal of time defending or pursuing what we “deserve” to have in life, so easily forgetting God, *“Who richly provides us with everything to enjoy”* (1 Timothy 6:17b). *“Mark this, then, you who forget God, lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver! The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies Me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!”* (Psalm 50:22-23) *“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”* (2 Cor. 9:15) for He HAS shown us His salvation and inheritance in His love, grace, and mercy through Jesus Christ! We don’t deserve our lives, much less good things, much less Jesus!

Do you feel you deserve or are entitled to anything? Health? A good job? A normal life? I pray we examine ourselves for ungrateful thoughts, that we would instead be found always *“looking to Jesus,”* (Hebrews 12:2a), *“Who rescues us from the wrath to come”* (1 Thess. 1:10b). May we continually offer sacrifices of thanksgiving in all circumstances for His love, mercy, and grace in adopting us into the family of God. Praise His name! Amen!

Thoughts? _____

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Jesus Is With Us Always

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4 NASB).

There are valleys of shadow and canyons of darkness cutting across our walk through this sinful world. Tragedies, illnesses, panic, and fear can come suddenly upon us like low places of uncertain depths or dangers through which we must go. God did not create life to be this way. In Eden, there were no valleys of darkness, pain, or death. Everything was a “level” way: *“The way of the righteous is smooth; O Upright One, make the path of the righteous level”* (Isaiah 26:7).

On level ground, we know what to expect with every step. But Adam and Eve’s sin created the spiritual lows of our present world. Where there are pits, cliffs, and canyons, we do not always know what dangers and difficulties are before us as we walk, but we have seen some of our friends and family descend into such valleys. And we know we have valleys of our own we must walk through. This can make us anxious about what lies ahead.

Anxiety is “a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome”

(Google Dictionary). So, how can we be expected to *“be anxious for nothing”* (Philippians 4:6a)? Because the final outcome is certain for the Believer: *“We shall **always** be with the Lord”* (1 Thessalonians 4:17b). We will be in the presence of Jesus forever in eternity. However, it isn’t just the outcome that is certain but the walk as well, for

Jesus said, *“I am with you **always**, even to the end of the age”* (Matthew 28:20b). While God doesn’t promise to keep us from the valleys of life, He does promise to go with us Himself into every place that we must go.

We have the help of His presence every moment of our walk in this life: *“Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand”* (Isaiah 41:10). This is His promise to us, and our prayer to Him should be, *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts”* (Psalm 139:23), for *“when my anxious thoughts multiply within me, Your consolations delight my soul”* (Psalm 94:19).

There are times when God can feel distant and we are disturbed: *“Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him For the help of His presence”* (Psalm 42:5). *“Say to those with anxious heart, ‘Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; The recompense of God will come, But He will save you’”* (Isaiah 35:4). *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God”* (Philippians 4:6).

Yes, may our prayer be, *“Teach me to do Your will, For You are my God; Let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground”* (Psalm 143:10). It is His Spirit with us that makes our road through the crooked and perverse valleys of this fallen life a level way of righteousness. He is with us: *“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you”* (John 14:18), and He has come to each of us by the Holy Spirit, *“that He may be with you **forever**”* (John 14:16b). Our walk is certain, for Jesus is with us always. And the outcome of our walk is certain, for we will be with Jesus always. *“As for me, I trust in You, O Lord, I say, ‘You are my God’”* (Psalm 31:14b). Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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“My Flesh Is True Food”

“And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7 NASB).

It was not by accident that Jesus was first seen by the world in a manger—a trough (a “dinner plate” for animals) where food is put for beasts! This spoke symbolically to the powerful purpose Jesus came to fulfill when He was born into the world that first Christmas.

Have you ever thought what the food on your plate is doing there? It isn’t there for itself! The carrot and the turkey is not at the table for its benefit, but for yours. That carrot could have lived out its natural life in the earth, and that bird could have enjoyed pecking the ground until it died of old age. But instead, its life was sacrificed and provided to you, so that you could live by partaking of it. Without this food, you would starve to death.

Jesus was not born into this world for His benefit, but to give His life so that we could live. Symbolically, He was food for the world: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever”* (John 6:53-58). You must partake of His Life to live—Jesus is the only Way to escape death. Without Him, we

are starving ourselves to death.

Another symbol of this reality was the Passover, for when John the Baptist first saw Jesus walking towards him, he said, *“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”* (John 1:29) Those of you familiar with the Passover know that a family would bring a lamb into their home and sacrifice it. Its blood symbolized taking the family’s sin upon itself and giving them its life in exchange, for God would “pass over” the family’s guilt. The family then ate the lamb for physical sustenance. In John’s vision of Heaven, Jesus was seen as *“a Lamb standing, as if slain”* (Revelation 5:6b), while the Elders of Heaven sing, *“Worthy are You...for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation”* (Revelation 5:9b).

Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples just before He died: *“And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood’”* (Luke 22:19-20). The life Jesus gives is spiritual through His death for our sins, but Jesus will also give us physical life from Himself by raising us from the dead to life eternal.

When Jesus returns to rule the earth after the Tribulation, He will no more be the sacrificed lamb offered for the life of the world, slain for the benefit of sinners. He will come as the conquering *“Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David”* (Revelation 5:5b), *“the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, Who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen”* (1 Timothy 6:15b-16)!

Thoughts? _____

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The Promise of Christ

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:23 NASB).

God first promised Jesus after the fall in the Garden, when God told satan (the serpent), *“I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise Him on the heel”* (Genesis 3:15).

Today, it is easy for Christians to see that God was referring here to Jesus, but did Adam and Eve understand what God was promising? Yes, for we see that Eve *“conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, ‘I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD’”* (Genesis 4:1b). Many see Eve giving thanks to God for her child, but the Hebrew reads literally, “I have gotten/made man Yahweh,” which is why it can be translated: *“I have given birth to a male child—the LORD”* (ISV).

Eve understood the promise of God concerning the coming of the Son of God, and likely believed Cain (which means “acquired transaction” in the root and was applied to redeeming slaves) was the promised seed. Like Abraham after her, she was *“fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform”* (Romans 4:21). This would also help explain why Abel’s name signifies “vanity,” because his mother probably thought him “unnecessary” as Cain was the “promised one.” Eve must have been devastated when Cain killed Abel and was cursed by God. Like many after her, she did not consider *“that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day”* (2 Peter 3:8b).

I’m sure people probably mocked the promise of the Son of God to Eve in her later life, and we don’t

know if she maintained her faith like those of her children who *“died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance”* (Hebrews 11:13).

Eve never saw the Son of God in her lifetime, Who could save her from her sin—that honor would come 4,000 years later to her daughter Mary, for when *“the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons”* (Galatians 4:4-5). This is *“the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU’”* (Acts 13:32-33), *“for all the promises of God find their Yes in Him. That is why it is through Him that we utter our Amen to God for His glory”* (2 Corinthians 1:20).

Jesus Christ was not an afterthought revealed thousands of years later to the Prophets. God promised the Son of God from the Fall. It took much longer for Him to appear than many expected, but we know *“the Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9). We too need this encouragement as we wait for Jesus to return, for *“in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation’”* (2 Peter 3:3b-4). Like the men and women of faith before us, we must be fully assured that God will perform what He has promised in His timing, for *“He who promised is faithful”* (Hebrews 10:23b), and He has promised, *“I am coming quickly”* (Rev. 3:11a). Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Ambassadors for Christ

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

The Believer’s relationship to the world and to Heaven has been a challenging topic for Christians in every generation. But Scripture is very clear in its choice of words to help us understand what our situation truly is.

In speaking about our relationship to the world, David told God, “*we are sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope [abiding, prospect]*” (1 Chronicles 29:15) in the world. A sojourner is someone who is living in a foreign land temporarily—they are aliens (belonging to another nation), but are living side-by-side with the citizens of the land: “*By faith [Abraham] lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land[...], for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God[...], having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them*” (Hebrews 11:9a-16). As people of Faith, Believers are no longer citizens belonging to the world, but are aliens to it, for we have renounced it for loyalty to King Jesus. Therefore you “*are no longer strangers and aliens [to the Kingdom of Heaven], but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household*” (Ephesians 2:19).

But how are we citizens of Heaven, when we are not physically living in the Kingdom of Heaven? Because, “*we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God*” (2 Corinthians 5:20). An ambassador is a citizen of his country sent by his government to live in a foreign land as a representative, serving the interests of his homeland, *peaceably* appealing reconciliation: “*don’t risk the wrath of my king.*” While living in the foreign land, he is respectful of the customs and laws, unless they require him to do things that harm his king. Ambassadors are only recalled to their homeland when war is declared, because the time for peaceful appeal has ended—violence now decides the dispute.

In like manner, the Believer remains an ambassador for the Kingdom of Heaven in the world, so long as the “cold war” of the Church-age continues. A “cold war” is a period of hostility between two kingdoms, but as neither one is prepared yet to go to full war, they maintain their embassies and seek to peacefully (yet forcefully) appeal for their interests. The Church-age “cold war” will end when God declares war on the world (the Great Tribulation), pouring out His wrath on the “*god of this world*” (2 Corinthians 4:4) and “*all the kingdoms of the world*” (Matthew 4:8b). In this moment God will recall all His ambassadors to Him, “catching” us away (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) because our mission in the world is suspended until we return with Jesus when He physically invades and conquers the world. Then He will give us “*authority over the nations*” (Revelation 2:26b).

Until this time, we are to be faithful citizens and loyal ambassadors of the Kingdom of Heaven while we live and work in the world, rejecting its attempts to distract and tempt us to adopt its ways and culture. Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Ambassadors in the World

“For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10 NASB).

As Ambassadors for Christ, we live far away from the Kingdom of Heaven, dwelling as aliens and strangers in the kingdoms of the world. The mission of our posting is to promote reconciliation to God and His Kingdom, for God has *“committed to us the Word of reconciliation”* (2 Corinthians 5:19b), which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Word of God.

But it is not easy to maintain the integrity of our mission while we go about our daily activities in this “foreign” land. As we eat in it, sleep in it, and shelter in its houses, the world’s demands and diversions both trouble and thrill us, undermining our focus on our mission.

Like an English ambassador intoxicated by exotic India or a French ambassador watching Germany gear up for war, we too can let the *“worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the Word, and it becomes unfruitful”* (Mark 4:19). This is why we are instructed to *“not fear their intimidation and do not be troubled”* (1 Peter 3:14b), but also commanded not to *“love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world”* (1 John 2:15-16). Anything that we love or fear in the world draws us into sympathy or respect for the *“ruler of this world”* (John 12:31b) and our loyalty will be divided. But *“no one can serve two masters; for*

either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other” (Matthew 6:24a).

This is why Paul teaches us to *“set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth”* (Colossians 3:2) — *“do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is”* (Romans 12:2a), so *“be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is”* (Ephesians 5:15-16).

Ambassadors bear great responsibility, having full authority to represent their King’s will in a foreign land. Hold fast, therefore, to His Word, which He committed to you, and *“see to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ”* (Colossians 2:8), for *“I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ”* (2 Corinthians 11:3). For this reason, apply yourself in your service, for you will give an account of it to your King: *“we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad”* (2 Corinthians 5:10).

*“Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession; **He was faithful to Him who appointed Him**”* (Hebrews 3:1-2a), so you too, *“whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. **It is the Lord Christ whom you serve**”* (Colossians 3:23-24). Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Man's Fingerprints on the Last Days

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

While God's attributes are obvious in the created nature all around us, for the first time in human history since the Flood, man is putting his lawless fingerprints on creation, and the earth is becoming “corrupted” again. We know creation was inherently corrupted by the Fall, but man could not take an active part in further corrupting its nature until the Flood, for *“then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”* (Genesis 6:5), and *“the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth”* (Genesis 6:11-12). Man exercised lawless force (violence) to obtain the desires of his sinful heart in the earth, adulterating God's creation until the Flood put a stop to it.

After this “reset,” creation again reminded Believers that though cursed by sin, *“the earth is the Lord's, and all it contains”* (Psalm 24:1a). Man could not get his hands on the nature of creation. As God's Ambassadors, it is an encouragement to see the unadulterated commerce of His Kingdom delivered to the sin-stained world where we are posted: pure sunlight, fresh rain, natural food, unadulterated sunsets, unpolluted waters, etc.

But in these Last Days, man has returned as an active, energetic agent of corruption, for *“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of*

the Son of Man” (Luke 17:26 ESV). Man's labors of force and lawlessness in these End Times are drawing our eyes away from God's *“invisible attributes, His eternal power, and divine nature”* (Romans 1:20a) as seen in His creation to instead be transfixed by displays of man's attributes, power, and nature in what he has done, is doing, and intends to do in creation. Whether the pervasive contrails man leaves in the sky as he goes *“to and fro”* (Daniel 12:4b), the lawless genetic engineering of nature, human transformation, or pervasively corrupt media, man is increasingly on our minds by what *he* is doing in the earth.

As Ambassadors living in the Last Days, we are witnessing man's build-up to confrontation with God, for mankind plots to cast off God's restraint of their violent ways in the earth: *“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, ‘Let us burst Their bonds apart and cast away Their cords from us’”* (Psalm 2:1-3 ESV).

This should not discourage us, but spur us on in our mission of preaching reconciliation to God, just like Noah (2 Peter 2:5). We know the time is short, for soon *“the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction”* (2 Thessalonians 2:3), and *“the nations were enraged, and [God's] wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to **destroy those who destroy the earth**”* (Revelation 11:18). May we hold fast and say with Job, *“As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth”* (Job 19:25) to bring *“the period of restoration of all things”* (Acts 3:21b) by His righteous reign. Come, King Jesus! Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Who's Foundation? What Context?

“For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11 NASB).

Context is crucial in growing your understanding of something—it is the only sure foundation upon which to build and increase your knowledge. Without the proper context, our understanding will be slanted, cracked, or irregular because our foundation is wrong.

Every Believer has been tempted to utilize God's Word to support their “world-view.” But this is wrong. We cannot emphasize Scripture that we like (that appeals to our feelings, experiences, or intellect) and de-emphasize Scripture that doesn't seem to fit our view. When we do this, we are manufacturing our own context to try and understand God's character and nature—we are laying our own hodge-podge foundation to build our knowledge of Who God is and what we are to Him. Paul warned us, *“like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it, for no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ”* (1 Corinthians 3:10-11). We have seen people emphasize Scriptures out of context to represent God as an angry, vengeful “curmudgeon,” while others likewise paint God as an unholy, tolerant “hippie.” In like manner we are tempted at times to “cut and paste” His Word, laying Scriptures out of joint, pounding them into a “foundation” that will support our “dream house.”

But in order to do this, we have to tear up God's foundation that He has clearly given us in His

Word for His House, the Church! He has already laid the foundation to establish Who He is and who we are as Believers in Him. This foundation is Jesus Christ, and God tells us in His Word exactly what knowing Jesus intimately means for us. It is only through *“knowing Christ Jesus my Lord”* (Philippians 3:8) that we mature in the context of our adoption as Sons in *“God's household”* (Ephesians 2:19), and the Church's betrothal to Christ as His Bride (Ephesians 5:25-27). God has told us that because of Jesus, He IS our Father and we ARE His children, and He is telling us that Christ IS our husband and we ARE His bride. Without this relational context, we cannot hope to understand God's Word and concepts such as **Justification** (adoption/betrothal agreement), **Sanctification** (disciplined upbringing/betrothal period), or the **Resurrection and Rapture** (date set by the Father for our inheritance/Bride-groom's return for His bride to take her to her wedding). God didn't give us Jesus as a Foundation for us to ignore or overlook Him, but to have assurance about Who He is and who we are to Him.

We must take care that we are not making others build their understanding of Who God is upon OUR foundation. Therefore, *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are...men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some. Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness’”* (2 Timothy 2:15-19). May we build our knowledge on the foundation of Jesus Christ only and what God has said in His Word—you are His Child and you are Christ's Bride! Amen.

Thoughts?_____

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Light in the Spiritual Darkness—P1

“Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent” (Acts 17:30 NASB).

We often overlook the radical change that occurred in the open affairs of man through the delivery of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Before the Cross, God allowed satan’s government to rule the world brazenly in spiritual darkness (except for Israel) —today we call this ancient government “paganism,” denoting all the ancient religious theocracies that ruled people before the Gospel arrived. During these days, the people of gentile nations everywhere openly worshipped and celebrated the demonic realm in every facet of their lives, completely ignorant of their spiritual bondage. The common people were “in the dark,” blind and ignorant to the fact that the “gods” they turned to for help were the very ones harming them. Because of this blindness, satan’s government could operate unrestrained — *“the works of the flesh”* (Galatians 5:19) were evident.

As the Gospel came to the Gentile nations, the common people rapidly abandoned satan’s government. Why? They suddenly saw it for what it was: *“The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great Light, And those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, Upon them a Light dawned”* (Matthew 4:16). This was Jesus Who said, *“I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness”* (John 12:46). As the Gospel spread, the Apostle John observed, *“the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining”* (1 John 2:8b). Through Jesus, the Holy Spirit came to *“convict the world concerning sin and*

righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8), restraining satan’s government. The people were convicted and saw their bondage to the *“elemental spirits of the world”* (Colossians 2:20 ESV). God *“disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in [Jesus]”* (Colossians 2:15), for He came *“to destroy the works of the devil”* (1 John 3:8) — totally when He returns.

But the rulers and powers hated the Light and sought to preserve satan’s government, conspiring *“against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, ‘Let us burst Their bonds apart and cast away Their cords from us’”* (Psalm 2:2-3), because *“the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil”* (John 3:19). In order to survive in the Light of the Gospel, satan’s government had to be concealed, because whenever it tried to “come out,” it was exposed for what it was. It ceased being openly “pagan” and instead became occult (def. “to hide, conceal, secret”), operating in the background. Satan will remain ruling from the shadows, worshipped by “initiated” rulers as *“the god of this world”* (2 Cor. 4:4) until he can come out in the open again in the last days when the Holy Spirit’s restraint (bonds) on him will be removed, *“so that in his time he will be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way”* (2 Thess. 2:6-7). Then, the Tribulation of Earth will begin.

So, as the world labors to bring this day upon the Earth, we are to *“take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light”* (Eph. 5:11-14a). Jesus is the Light. *“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”* (Rev. 22:20b)

Thoughts? _____

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Media—Suppressing the Spirit?—P2

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

As we saw last time, David prophesied that *“the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, ‘Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us’”* (Psalm 2:2-3). The primary bond on satan’s government today that forced it into the shadows is the Holy Spirit, Who is *“restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time”* (2 Thessalonians 2:6). One of the ways the Holy Spirit restrains satan’s government is by convicting ***“the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment”*** (John 16:8). Because of the Holy Spirit’s work, everywhere the Gospel went, people came to the Lord, and nations became “Christianized,” which also meant they became “more civilized,” condoning less (in public) the lawless, violent deeds that were a way of life in Pagan times. Yet, many rulers and powers secretly continued their allegiance to satan’s government and served its ways hidden (Occult) from the public’s eye, covering up its evil work and laboring for its return to open rule. In pursuit of this day, the “initiated” powers have labored for centuries from the shadows to “burst” the Holy Spirit’s “bonds” that restrain the evil they desire to bring openly into the whole world.

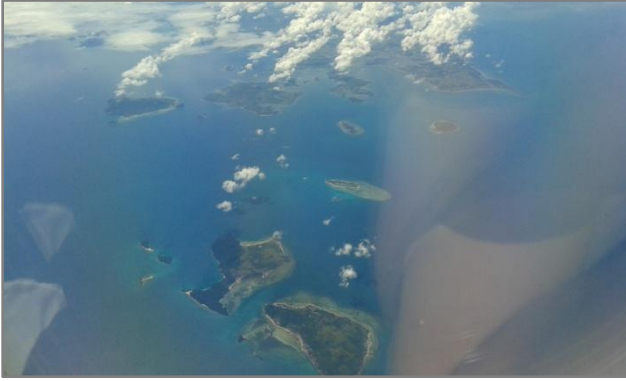
In these last days, they have renewed their labors to **suppress** the Holy Spirit’s voice convicting the world. How? One way is through the increase in *“knowledge”* (Daniel 3:4) that has

allowed them to weave around the world a binding “web” (Isaiah 59:5) of mass communication (music, movies, TV, internet, etc) collectively called “Media.” **Media** is the plural form of **Medium** - “an agency by which something is accomplished, conveyed, or transferred” (Free Dictionary). In like manner, the ancient definition of a Medium was the prophet or channel through whom a demon conveyed its “word” into the world: *“Do not turn to mediums or spiritists; do not seek them out to be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God”* (Leviticus 19:31). Modern Media conveys a defiling voice that goes out into all the world, telling us **sin is okay, there is no righteousness, and there will be no judgment**— it “un-convicts” people. For the first time in history, the devil has a relentless voice speaking his mind to people everywhere, and they consume its deluding influence with an insatiable appetite for its words and images, which they imitate in their lives. Every year the content “streamed” into our minds becomes increasingly lawless and violent—the works of the flesh *“evident”* (Gal. 5:19), which could not have been so widely learned any other way.

While the Holy Spirit speaks the Word of God into the world, this modern “Medium” is a false prophet speaking the word of satan—a forerunner of the False Prophet and Beast, *“whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness”* (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). *“Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion’”* (Hebrews 3:7-8a ESV), for those who suppress His voice in rebellion will suffer God’s eternal wrath. Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Casting Off the Cords of Death?—P3

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12 NASB).

Since the Fall, man has dreamed of breaking through the boundaries God has placed on him, which constrain his evil desires—David prophesied about this conspiracy in Psalm 2.

Another boundary, “cord,” or “fetter” that the great men of the earth are trying to cast off today is DEATH because it brings an end to each man’s will, desires, and work in the world. Death is a limit and a restraint on what he can do and how long he can do it. As billionaire technologist Larry Ellison declares, “death makes me very angry,” and billionaire Peter Thiel sees death as man’s “great enemy.”

From the Fall, man has sought after fountains of youth, elixirs of life, and alchemy, but today he believes he will finally achieve this dream through his increase in “knowledge” (Daniel 3:4). In 2015 news headlines ran: “Tech Titan’s Latest Project: Defy Death” and “Fixing the ‘problem’ of ageing is the mission of Silicon Valley, where billions is pouring into biotech firms working to ‘hack the code’ of life – despite concerns about the social implications.” Thiel says, “The great unfinished task of the modern world is to turn death from a fact of life into a problem to be solved — a problem towards whose solution I hope to contribute in whatever way I can...I think our society is dominated by people who are into denial or acceptance, and I prefer to fight it.”

While the desire to escape the bonds of death is very real, God has placed that boundary in man’s way, as Job reflected: “[man’s] *days are determined, the number of his months is with You;*

and his limits You have set so that he cannot pass” (Job 14:5). God “*made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation*” (Acts 17:26).

Even so, God does not bear responsibility for placing this boundary in man’s way. He did not cause man’s death. Man bears the guilt for his own death, because it is the outcome of his rebellion against God—the judgment God warned Adam and Eve would happen should they rebel. And when Adam and Eve followed Lucifer’s rebellion and tried to make themselves “*like God*” (Isaiah 14:14), God upheld this righteous judgment. The ONLY way to overcome “*the cords of death*” (Psalm 18:4a) and obtain immortality is through repenting of our rebellion to God and being reconciled to Him in His mercy by the blood of Jesus Christ—Jesus paid the price required by God’s judgment through His death for your rebellion as He stood in your place and “*abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*” (2 Timothy 1:10).

But man is unwilling to surrender his rebellion in exchange for eternal life by reconciliation to God through Jesus. Man wants to be able to continue deciding for himself what is “*good and evil*” (Genesis 3:5) without suffering the consequence of death in himself. So, in the eyes of the rulers and powers, God and His Anointed stand in their way, and so they conspire to “*burst their bonds*” (Psalm 2:3). Like Lucifer, they will not succeed, for though he tried with all his rebellious might to make himself like God, he “*will be thrust down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit*” (Isaiah 14:15b).

It seems that God will allow man a taste of his desire during the Tribulation when, ironically, “*men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them*” (Revelation 9:6). Be careful what you wish for—only Jesus will truly abolish death (1 Corinthians 15:23-26). Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Conspiracy Against Christ?—P4

“Yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him” (1 Corinthians 8:6).

The Father has exalted His Son above all powers, subjecting ALL THINGS to Him. Mankind in his rebellion is seeking to cast off Jesus (Psalm 2)—a necessary step to successfully rebel against Him, *“for by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together”* (Colossians 1:16-17). Jesus *“is the radiance of [the Father’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power”* (Hebrews 1:3), and He *“will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself”* (Philippians 3:21), *“for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen”* (Romans 11:36). He is God’s Salvation for us!

Under the influence of satan’s government, man believes he can “cast off” Christ’s rule (Psalm 2), wrestling power over “all things” into his own hands—saving himself. As futurist Mark Pesce explains, man’s goal is to save himself “with perfect knowledge and perfect will; **To become as gods, take the universe in hand, and transform it in our image—for our own delight...salvation –**

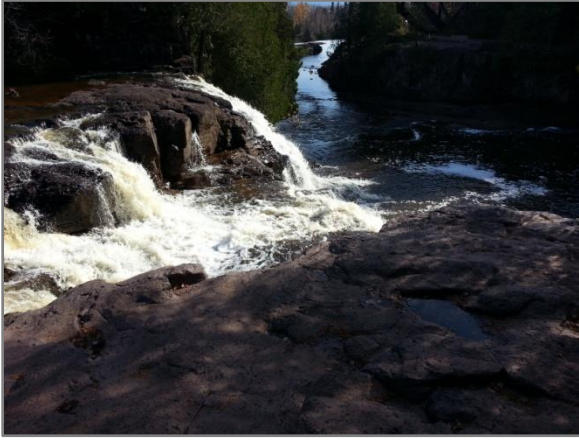
attained by good works.” There are many examples of man’s “good works” to this end—one such is the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) in Switzerland, backed by all the world powers. The largest, most expensive (\$13 billion) scientific machine ever made, the LHC smashes tiny pieces of matter together at near the speed of light to “break them apart.” “Its purpose is simple but ambitious: to **crack the code of the physical world**; to figure out what the universe is made of; in other words, to get to the very bottom of things” (National Geographic). In 2012, the LHC found “the elusive ‘*God particle*’ that gives matter mass and **holds the physical fabric of the universe together**” (UK Telegraph), allowing it to exist.

In 2003, man “cracked the code of life” - the human genome, which allows him to manipulate the laws of life. If man can now crack the code of the physical word, he could manipulate many of the physical laws that govern all of nature, which he has been powerless to change. Man believes “knowledge is power,” and the ultimate motivation behind the LHC and man’s increase in “knowledge” (Daniel 3:4) is his pursuit to become a **Power**—a man-god. As science writer Arthur C. Clarke said: “It may be that our role on this planet is not to worship God - but to create him.” It is man’s conspiracy against God and Christ that has always been paving the way for the revelation of the Anti-Christ—a “god-man” who can “cast off” Christ and “save” mankind in the way he wants to be saved. This is *“the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God”* (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). He will intend *“to make alterations in times and in law”* (Daniel 7:25b), and he speaks *“monstrous [or marvelous] things against the God of gods”* (Daniel 11:36a).

“Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him” (Daniel 11:45b) and his followers, for Jesus will return with *“power and great glory”* (Luke 21:27) to *“break them with a rod of iron”* (Psalm 2:9a). Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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The Father Answers Man—P5

“For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience” (Colossians 3:6).

While satan is *“the ruler of this world”* (John 12:31), the Father has power over him, for He *“has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all”* (Psalm 103:19). *“The kingdom is the Lord’s And He rules over the nations”* (Psalm 22:28).

Man’s conspiracy with satan to “cast off” God’s “fetters,” His Holy Spirit’s restraint, and His Son’s coming reign over the earth may seem overwhelming to us, but *“He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them. Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury, saying, ‘But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain’”* (Psalm 2:4-6). His King is Jesus Christ, who told the rulers, *“My kingdom is not of this world”* (John 18:36a) when He came to redeem mankind by His blood, but the day is near when Jesus will return, and the world will hear *“loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever’”* (Rev. 11:15).

The Father decreed this *“Day of the Lord”* (Obadiah 1:15), and promised it to His Son, Who testified: *“I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession’”* (Psalm 2:7-8). The angel Gabriel told Mary that on earth, God’s Son would be named *“Jesus. He will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God*

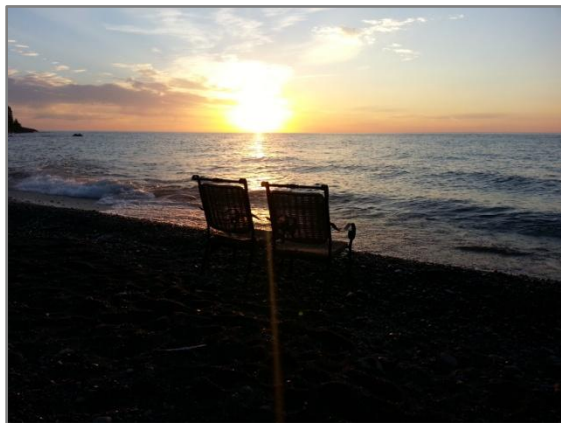
will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end” (Luke 1:32-33).

Despite man’s increase in knowledge and his technological sorcery, the time will come when *“the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb’”* (Rev. 6:15-16), fulfilling the Father’s promise to His Son: *“You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware”* (Psalm 2:9). All man’s “good works” to save himself from God’s judgment of his sin will instead reap destruction, for their “savior” is the *“son of destruction”* (2 Thess. 2:3). Regardless how terribly *“the nations were enraged...[God’s] wrath came, and the time came...to destroy those who destroy the earth”* (Rev. 11:18).

“Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; take warning, O judges of the earth. Worship the LORD with reverence and rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled” (Psalm 2:10-12a). Mankind must understand that the Father’s present *“kindness and tolerance and patience”* (Romans 2:4) is grace for repentance, not a blind eye for their sin; therefore, as *“the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel”* (Mark 1:15b)! Turn from *“immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you...that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God”* (Gal. 5:19-21). *“Be saved from this perverse generation!”* (Acts 2:40b), *“through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Acts 20:21a) - *“How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!”* (Psalm 2:12b). Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Revelation of the Sons of God—P6

“For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13).

The great irony of man’s rebellion is that the god-like status he grasps at to attain will be given as a free gift to the Sons of God, while he will suffer eternal judgment for trying to “cast off” (Psalm 2:1-3) the Father’s bonds, Christ’s reign, and the Holy Spirit’s restraint.

Man labors to bring the “salvation” of the “*Son of Destruction*” (2 Thess. 2:3), but it will lead instead to the “*desolation*” (Matt. 24:15-22) of earth and “*eternal punishment*” from God (Matt. 25:46). It is only through Jesus Christ that man can achieve a salvation to eternal life through the power of His Resurrection, for “*those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead...cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection*” (Luke 20:35-36). Yet man rejects God’s gift of Life because it requires him to submit himself to God and surrender his sin nature to Christ’s work in him.

Man also loses the power God would freely give him in Jesus. In this life Believers “*have **tasted** the goodness of the word of God and **the powers of the age to come***” (Hebrews 6:4b-5). In Christ, they could speak any language (Acts 2:6), heal physical trauma (Acts 20:10), repair bodies broken from birth (Acts 3:8), heal sickness and disease (Luke 10:9), had power over spirits that manipulate/possess people (Acts 16:18), could perform great wonders (Acts 6:8), bring dead people back to life (Acts 9:40), see the future (Acts

11:28), punish the ungodly (Acts 13:11), suffer no harm from dangerous animals (Acts 28:3-6), etc.

This is all but a “taste” of the powers to come as these Believers were still mortal, suffered, and died. In the resurrection, this taste of Jesus will become sustaining, for though not equal to Him, we will “*be like Him*” (1 John 3:2): He is glorious, could appear and disappear (Luke 24:31), had power over nature (John 21:6), could not die, and much more (all things man is grasping at with his technology).

Now, “*He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father*” (Revelation 2:26-27). Then will be “*the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time*” (Acts 3:21b). Believers will help restore creation, “*for the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God*” (Rom. 8:19-21).

Now, no true Believer grasps at these promises, nor “believes” in Christ to get at them, for Jesus told us that “*a slave is not greater than his master*” (John 13:16b), and our Master Jesus “*did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant...He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him*” (Phil. 2:6b-9). “*Have this attitude in yourselves*” (Phil. 2:5). May we also empty ourselves, and “*walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God*” (Col. 1:10). May you “*walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory*” (1 Thess. 2:12). For He is worthy!

Thoughts? _____

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Man Has a Problem, and He Knows It

“All have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one” (Romans 3:12).

Man has always known he has a problem—a problem preventing him from keeping perfect peace and justice and from reclaiming paradise. Every culture has acknowledged it in one way or another. The Greeks called it “Hamartia” or the **tragic/fatal flaw** (“to err; to miss the mark”). It was the inherent defect or shortcoming in man that brought tragedy. (It is also the Greek word translated in the book of Romans as “sin” in English). Man’s tragic flaw causes him to wage war, massacre innocents, pillage, steal, murder, deceive, and betray. It brings death and makes “good” people do BAD things. Ancient man didn’t take responsibility for it; instead, he blamed it on his gods who he claimed had made him this way!

While man no longer blames his fatal flaw on “gods,” he still will not take responsibility for it—he now blames it on evolution (*Nature* made him the way he is)! But with his growing power today, the fatal part of man’s flaw has alarmed the great atheist minds of the world. As famed scientist Stephen Hawking explains: **“we are entering an increasingly dangerous period of our history.** Our population and our use of the finite resources of planet Earth are growing exponentially, along with **our technical ability to change the environment for good or ill. But our genetic code still carries the selfish and aggressive instincts that were of survival advantage in the past. It will be difficult enough to avoid disaster in the next hundred years, let alone the next thousand or**

million. Our only chance of long-term survival is not to remain inward-looking on planet Earth, but to spread out into space.” Billionaire business magnate Elon Musk agrees: “Either we spread earth to other planets, or we risk going extinct. An extinction event is inevitable and **we’re increasingly doing ourselves in.**” He formed SpaceX to try and save mankind from self-destruction by making a “way of life” for man in space. But even this would not save man from himself, for he brings his nature with him, and he still suffers the fatal end of his flaw—DEATH.

Man cannot save himself from his “selfish and aggressive instincts” because he is responsible for causing them: *“through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned”* (Rom. 5:12). The source of man’s flaw is himself, and it is spiritual. God made man without a flaw—man “flawed” himself in rebelling against God. This is why he is trapped in his tragic cycles of creation and destruction; joy and sorrow; life and death. Yet man refuses to admit that he is responsible for sin and that he must address it with God or face judgment (eternal death). Man will try any “way” other than admit his guilt. There is always *“a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death”* (Prov. 14:12).

In love and mercy, God provided His Son, Jesus, as the *only* WAY of LIFE for man to be saved from his fatal flaw. Jesus took the judgment for our sin upon Himself, and offers us exemption from its fatal cost if we accept Him as our Lord. Jesus reconciles us back to God and life: *“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus”* (Titus 2:11-13 ESV), Who will resurrect to sinless perfection those who trust in His gift of salvation. He alone will establish paradise on Earth through His sinless Millennial Kingdom! Even so, Amen!

Thoughts? _____

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What Sort of People Are We? - P1

“Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness” (2 Peter 3:11 NASB).

It is true that *“the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever”* (1 John 2:16-17 ESV). While we have a promise that we will abide forever through Jesus Christ, we still struggle with attraction to things destined for destruction. Each of us still struggles with sin, for *“if we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us”* (1 John 1:8). Is there anything in you today destined for destruction? YES!

What’s up with that? While you were justified in a moment by God through Jesus Christ, God’s work to sanctify you continues throughout your life. Jesus *“gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness [justification] and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession [sanctification] who are zealous for good works”* (Titus 2:14). Like all children, the Children of God also misbehave at times, but God is raising you to be mature. He is purifying and preparing you NOW for the responsibility of the inheritance He has for you at the coming of Jesus Christ. Your life today should reflect that. God did not save you just for this lifetime—He has *“caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last*

time” (1 Peter 1:3-5). God made us His children! Why? To obtain an inheritance in Christ’s coming Kingdom on earth and through all eternity!

It used to be that a child’s upbringing prepared them to manage their inheritance in their father’s estate or business. They were not passive heirs, but were given works to do that prepared them for their responsibilities. (In a similar way, you were likely raised with chores that helped prepare you for responsibility as an adult). As Believers, we also are not passive heirs: *“as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father”* (Gal. 4:1-2). Right now, this very day, the Holy Spirit has given you works to do, *“for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure”* (Phil. 2:13).

So, how are we to respond? Well, no child is maturing if they try to avoid their chores, so go to the Lord and *“seek His face continually”* (Psalm 105:4b)! Like Samuel, never tire of saying, *“here I am”* (1 Sam. 3:4). Confess your struggles often to your Father, for *“if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). AND seek your Father’s will: *“walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God”* (Col. 1:10). How do we do that? Listen to His Spirit and be in God’s Word, for *“all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work”* (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Word of God equips you through the Holy Spirit, to not only do the works God has given you, but that you would also bear the Fruit of His Spirit while doing them. So, approach the works of each day to please the Lord, for He has given them to purify us for the responsibilities of our eternal inheritance in Christ’s Kingdom. Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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What Sort of People Are We? - P2

“Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:11 ESV).

In the world today, *“the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God”* (Gal. 5:19-21). The works of the flesh are not “good” works. People who do them are NOT struggling against sin—they are not heirs to Christ’s Kingdom and are not Children of the Father.

As a Child of God, you DO struggle *“in your struggle against sin”* (Heb. 12:4a). Paul tells us, that we are really struggling against spiritual powers, *“for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm”* (Eph. 6:12-13). As Children of God, we are to resist the “bad” works of the flesh, because we have been re-born through Jesus as a new creation to work the works of our Father (not the works of the forces of wickedness), for *“we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them”* (Eph. 2:10).

However, there is something more than good

works that God created you for in Jesus. He wants you to *“walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God”* (Col. 1:10). We aren’t just to be doing good works, we are to bear fruit in them. God cares most about what’s going on in your heart. You can be a mighty doer of good works, but inwardly you are fruitless or full of rotten fruit (doing it for the praise of men, out of guilt, to make yourself feel better, as a step to get something you want, to try and purchase salvation, etc). The Father wants you to do good works AND bear good fruit in yourself by doing them, for we were joined to Christ *“in order that we might bear fruit for God. For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death”* (Romans 7:4b-5).

We are not to do the works of the flesh and bear the fruit of death, as we did before we were *“created in Christ Jesus.”* Rather, in good works, we are to bear the Fruit of the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Life), which is *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires”* (Gal. 5:22-24).

Every day, there are events, thoughts, temptations, and acts that happen in your life that are opportunities for you to bear Fruit of the Spirit in the work that you are doing. Are you ill or suffering? It can be a great labor to bear the Fruit of the Spirit when your flesh is on fire. Perhaps you are stressed out or overwhelmed? These are all moments for us to give ourselves over to Christ’s work in us, crucifying the flesh, un-working the works of the flesh, producing the Fruit of the Spirit in the good works before us.

For the Gospel of Jesus Christ *“is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth”* (Colossians 1:6b). Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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What Sort of People Are We? - P3

“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men” (Colossians 3:23 ESV).

The Believer has been *“created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them”* (Eph. 2:10). In doing these good works, which benefit others and the world, we are to *“bear fruit for God”* (Romans 7:4b) in ourselves by his Holy Spirit.

Why are we called to do all this? As adopted Children, we are imitating our Heavenly Father Who has ALWAYS only ever done good works *“for the word of the Lord is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness”* (Psalm 33:4). Why does God do His works? *“God my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth”* (Psalm 74:12). All God’s work brings life and salvation to His fallen creation! His works represent His Kingdom and its Salvation: *“All Your works shall give thanks to You, O LORD, and all Your saints shall bless You! They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom and tell of Your power, to make known to the children of man Your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of Your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations. [The LORD is faithful in all His words and kind in all His works.]”* (Psalm 145:10-13).

As adopted Children of the Father, we are to imitate His nature on Earth and represent His Kingdom, ruled over by Jesus Christ, His *“only begotten Son”* (John 3:16 NASB). Christ’s Kingdom is the only thing that is going to survive and thrive through all eternity—everything else is going *“to be destroyed”* (2 Peter 3:11 NASB).

This is why we are to be focused on the works of God, because these works are the only things that will last! This is why Jesus was intent on doing only the works of His Father in the Earth: *“Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work’”* (John 4:34). Jesus’ daily nourishment, energy, and sole purpose was to accomplish the works His Father had given Him to do according to His will, and He called on His disciples to imitate Him, doing good works inseparable from the Holy Spirit working in them: *“by this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples”* (John 15:8). For, *“the works that I do in My Father’s name bear witness about Me”* (John 10:25b). *“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father Who is in heaven”* (Matt. 5:16). *“For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God”* (John 3:20-21).

We are never alone doing God’s works, for after Jesus ascended, the disciples went out into the world, and *“the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs”* (Mark 16:20). God’s Holy Spirit IS working with us AND bearing fruit in us. If people do good works, but the Spirit is not in them bearing fruit to God, they are like those who say at the Judgment, *“‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and cast out demons in Your name, and do many mighty works in Your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness’”* (Matt. 7:22-23). Therefore, *“whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ”* (Col. 3:23-24). Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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What Sort of Mind Do We Have? - P4

“I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds” (Jeremiah 17:10 ESV).

After man’s rebellion against God in Eden, he relied on his sinful mind for direction as influenced by the god of this world. The result was that the *“intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”* (Gen. 6:5). This is because *“as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful”* (Rom. 1:28-31 NASB). God lets man rely on his own mind, if he wants to, proving that the consequence is all manner of futility and death, confirming that *“whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool”* (Pro. 28:26a ESV), for God has said, *“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways”* (Isa. 55:8a). Yet, still *“the wicked, in the haughtiness of his countenance, does not seek Him. All his thoughts are, ‘There is no God’”* (Ps. 10:4).

But God did not abandon man in the mess of his sin. He offers man salvation from his depraved, death-seeking mind through adoption as a Child of God to the Heavenly Father by faith in the work of Jesus Christ. How does God do this? He has given Believers His life-giving mind *“through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except*

*the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned... ‘For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ **But we have the mind of Christ**”* (1 Cor. 2:10-16).

With God’s mind in us, we *“must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds”* (Eph. 4:17), which they still do because *“the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”* (2 Cor. 4:4b). This is why to this day *“those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot”* (Rom. 8:5-7).

In your daily struggle with sin, whose mind are you drawing from? Are your thoughts, words, and works proceeding from man’s futile mind or the life-giving mind of God’s Son? Only the mind of Christ enables God’s adopted Children to bear the good fruit of His Spirit.

May we follow our Heavenly Father closely, relying daily on His mind in His Word and communion with His mind by His Spirit. In this way, *“be imitators of God, as beloved children”* (Eph. 5:1), loving *“the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”* (Matthew 22:37b). Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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A Mind Stayed on God's Mind - P5

“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You” (Isaiah 26:3 ESV).

Since sinful man *“did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind”* (Rom. 1:28). Believers have been saved from this depraved mind, for we have been given *“the mind of Christ”* (1 Cor. 2:16), freely receiving the thoughts of God through His Spirit in us!

Even so, we struggle with sin because our fleshly minds are so easily swayed by the thoughts of the mind of satan! This was perfectly illustrated when Jesus asked His disciples who they thought He was. *“Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven’”* (Matt. 16:16-17). God had revealed His mind to Peter (before the Holy Spirit was given to all Believers). Then without warning, Peter rebuked Jesus when He was sharing how He would suffer, die, and rise again. Jesus *“turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are a hindrance to Me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.’”* (Matt. 16:22-23). How easily satan inspired Peter's thoughts, appealing to the flesh!

In a similar way, the thoughts of the god of this world, have always intruded into the minds of Believers, tempting them to sin in thought and deed. In these Last Days, our minds are continually set upon with images and words that try to inspire thoughts of attraction, attention, and devotion to the world's ways. Like never before, through the world's internet, TVs, advertisements, movies, books, etc, we are incessantly tugged and pushed

by thousands of temptations, thoughts, persecutions, and beliefs that stream into our minds trying to trip and snare us. As satan tempted Jesus after the Holy Spirit descended on Him, showing Him all *“the kingdoms of the world and their glory”* (Matt. 4:8b) *“in a moment in time”* (Luke 4:5b), so also the devil shows us all their glory through the world's Media, tempting us in the same way, saying, *“all these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me [lit. prostrate yourself]”* (Matt. 4:9). Just as he did with Jesus, he appeals to our minds: *“submit to my ways to discover your potential, get the most out of life, get what you deserve, make your dreams come true,”* etc. But everything his world offers comes at the price of giving ourselves to it in prostration—*“the act of submitting, usually surrendering power to another”* (The Free Dictionary), instead of to God. In this way, he seeks to undermine the work and fruit that the Father has for His Children to bear as they mature for their eternal inheritance.

We know the visions of the glory of the world are *“fleeting pleasures of sin”* (Heb. 11:25b) destined for destruction, yet they set into our minds everywhere we look today. How can we stand strong when our fleshly minds are so weak to these thoughts? Stay your mind on God's mind in His Word, for then *“the Word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”* (Rom. 10:8), and draw near to His Spirit in you, for *“the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose”* (Rom. 8:26-28). Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Self-Control, a Fruit of the Spirit - P6

“A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls” (Proverbs 25:28 ESV).

Our thought-life is more important than we think. Sure, maybe you keep from committing the sin you are thinking about, but you still are thinking about it. Is that so bad? Its not like its real sin, after all, right?

Jesus took a pin and popped that thought bubble when He said, *“everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart”* (Matt-hew 5:28). If the thought is intent, it is sin, because God cares about what’s going on in your heart and mind. It’s important to Him, because it is the real you. Just so, Lucifer imagined a world without God’s judgment—a world where he was free to do as he wanted without repercussions: *“You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high...I will make myself like the Most High’”* (Isaiah 14:13-14). Lucifer thoughts were intending sin.

When we contemplate sin, we are fantasizing of a place and time without God’s authority and judgment—we want to get away with it. In this way, all sinful thoughts are rebellious, and *“rebellion is as the sin of divination”* (1 Sam. 15:23). Why divination? Because we’re bending an eager ear to a different spirit (satan) telling us what we want to hear: *“You have a right to do what you want.”*

But perhaps you say, “Yes, that’s why I exercise self-control over my thoughts.” God’s Word speaks about self-control, doesn’t it? Yes, but it is

self-control by the Holy Spirit, which is very different from human self-control. In human self-control you may bite your tongue, but the words or thoughts are still muttering in the bottom of your mind long afterwards. Human self-control tries to control the “volcano” with will-power. We chain the flesh in a dungeon deep down, but it stays alive down there. The anger, bitterness, lust, and all things of the flesh fester inside you—it doesn’t really go away, it just subsides below the surface, waiting for a sudden urge to break free or the prison walls to crumble around it. This sort of man is double-minded. His “public” self is different from what goes on in his basement. From society’s perspective, this may be acceptable, but there is a problem.

Old age, stress, alcohol, drugs, pain, trials, etc, all lower our will-power and self-control. It weakens them like acid corroding chains until people see what’s really going on beneath our public faces when the flesh snaps those chains and rises to the surface. When our strength fails us, all the ugliness we’ve tried to keep hidden emerges like a prison riot.

This is not what God means by self-control. God’s self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23), *“for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control”* (2 Tim. 1:7). With Godly self-control, you may also bite your tongue, but you make a practice of giving the anger, bitterness, or lust over to the Lord to deaden it, for *“those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires”* (Gal. 5:24). Here, the flesh is being put to death and not simply chained up in a dungeon, festering beneath the surface. In this way, we ought to continually practice self-control by the Spirit, that we would get better at “purifying” sinful thoughts and intents by handing them over to Him to be put to death, before they take residence in us.

In your thoughts, *“submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, **you double-minded**”* (James 4:8). Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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The Humbling Nature of Sin

“When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long” (Psalm 32:3 NASB).

In the Church, “sin” is often treated like a dirty word. No one likes to talk about it in regards to the Christian life, because it makes us feel uncomfortable and inadequate—it’s a ding to our pride. Yet, each one of us is not without sin. John confirmed this: *“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us”* (1 John 1:8). Yet he also says, *“No one who is born of God practices sin”* (1 John 3:9a). How do we reconcile these two verses? Well, Scripture makes a distinction between struggling with sin and practicing, living, or continuing in sin. Every Believer struggles with sin, but sin is not our calling or profession—Jesus Christ is our *“upward call of God”* (Phil. 3:14b), and His will is our profession, thus, we confess our sin, for *“if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9).

Often, when we are confronted with our sin by the Holy Spirit’s conviction or by our fellow man, our first reaction can be to feel exposed, like we’re under a microscope, or someone is taking a picture of us without permission. We often feel “picked out,” guilty and shameful, because we feel we are “losing face.” Why is this? Well, sin proves our inadequacy before God and others, and we like to control how we are seen by others, because we don’t like feeling judged. So, we put our “best face” forward to “cover up” our inadequacy and shield our pride, because our “best face” is how we want to be seen. All sin is facilitated and sheltered

by this *“boastful pride of life”* (1 John 2:16), which has a crush on the attitudes and behaviors of the world.

Like all Believers, David struggled with sin. Yet, his un-confessed sin tormented him—he was living with his “best face” forward, but he was hiding ugliness in his life and ignoring it before God. When Nathan the Prophet confronted him with his sin, David could have easily denied it and tried to make it “disappear.” He had a lot of face to lose! But just as God had said that David was *“a man after His own heart”* (1 Samuel 13:14b), he confessed his sin, let go his pride, and took responsibility for what he’d done, humbling himself before God.

Like David, we also have an ugly side—our flesh nature. Rather than try to ignore and conceal our sin because it makes us uncomfortable, our sin is an opportunity to come before the Lord in humility to confess it. There is no shame in this. You are not “losing face” with God, because He already knows your inadequacy! He knows every hidden crevice in your heart’s deepest, darkest cellar. God wants you to surrender the things you deny exist or don’t want anyone to see. He wants you to let go of the “image” of yourself that you want to be true and accept the reality of what you truly are—an inadequate sinner saved by the grace through His Son, Jesus Christ. Entrust your sin to Him, “lose face” before Him, yield your pride to Him, for *“God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”* So *“humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you”* (James 4:6a, 10). We cannot mature or grow in our relationship with Christ if we do not humble ourselves and confess to Him the sin in our lives.

Do not shrink back from His light of revelation upon your heart, for *“we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul”* (Heb. 10:39), *“so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming”* (1 John 2:28b). Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Looking for a Scapegoat?

“For no guilt of *mine*, they run and set themselves against me. Arouse Yourself to help me, and see!” (Psalm 59:4 NASB)

Like David’s enemies here, our first reaction when things aren’t going well is often to search for someone else to blame, rather than admit any responsibility we might have in the situation. It is the path of least resistance in our hearts, budding from our *“boastful pride of life”* (1 John 2:16). Even when we acknowledge guilt, we like to spread blame and accuse others, so that they “share” in our guilt.

This stems from the Fall when Adam tried to pin his guilt on Eve, while she in turn accused the serpent. Neither one took responsibility for their guilt before God, because they were trying to distance themselves from blame out of fear and pride. In the same way, when we sin, we often choose something or someone to share our guilt or take the full blame. In doing so, we become an “accuser.” This is no surprise, since our sin is an imitation of Satan, *“the accuser of our brethren...who accuses them before our God day and night”* (Rev. 12:10). Satan stands as an accuser of others, always looking to spread his guilt to everyone else or blame others for the evil that he does.

God created a picture in Israel of our ungodly “need” to distance ourselves from our sin and blame something or someone else. Under the Law, the High Priest confessed over a “scapegoat” (Lev. 16:10), *“all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a*

man who stands in readiness. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a solitary land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness” (Lev. 16:21-22). The goat bore the guilt of the people for their sins and was shunned, spurned, and rejected by the community. In our struggle with sin, our flesh desperately tries to avoid responsibility. We feel more comfortable with ourselves when others share our guilt or when we can accuse someone else. We don’t always send our “scapegoats” out from our midst, because they’re handy to keep around to blame for things. They are accepted inside “the group” so long as they perform their duty as a “whipping boy.” At any moment, we can send them into a “wilderness” of rejection, bearing our reproach.

Why did God give this idea of the scapegoat in His Law? God was foreshadowing the time when His Son would become a literal scapegoat for all mankind. Rather than coming to accuse us of our sins, Jesus came to be accused for our sins: *“the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him”* (Isa. 53:6), for *“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”* (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus humbled Himself to become the scapegoat of the entire world—all the sad, sick, and evil things we are responsible for having done in our lives were put on Him and He bore them away *“as far as the east is from the west”* (Psalm 103:12a), so that those who believe might be saved from them. *“For this reason also, God highly exalted Him”* (Phil. 2:8b-9a).

Looking to imitate Jesus, how can we possibly still try to shift responsibility and blame away from ourselves and towards others like Satan does? We cannot! In our struggles with sin, may we not give into fear of punishment or pride of life to scapegoat others for our sin. May we humble ourselves, take responsibility for our sin, and confess it to the Lord, knowing that *“if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). He will exalt the humble! Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Are You Playing By Their Rules?

“But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than men’”

(Acts 5:29 NASB).

From the Fall, man seeks his own will rather than God’s will. He creates societies (countries, communities, families) to benefit his will and he protects it with his own law (rules of what is “right” and “wrong”), instead of God’s Law. To be accepted and glorified in a human society, you must “play by the rules” they have made to keep you under their authority, otherwise you will be persecuted. Manipulative people get others to play their games by their rules so that “the house” always wins. They imitate the master-manipulator satan who tried to tempt Jesus to play his game and come under his will, saying, *“If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, ‘HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU’”* (Matt. 4:6a). But Jesus countered satan’s crafty twisting of God’s Word into “rules” for his game with the true Spirit behind the Word. Jesus was under His Father’s will.

“Society-makers” also use new societal rules to expose and persecute people who obey someone else, as in the case of Daniel where the rules of the society were changed to persecute his obedience to God (Daniel 6:4-17). We are seeing similar persecution today when people who don’t accept the new rules for what is deemed “right” in society are shunned, shamed, and even fired from their jobs. While most people choose to play by the rules rather than face this hostility, true Believers will always be persecuted, because they do not prostrate themselves to man’s ungodly rules but instead seek the will of God.

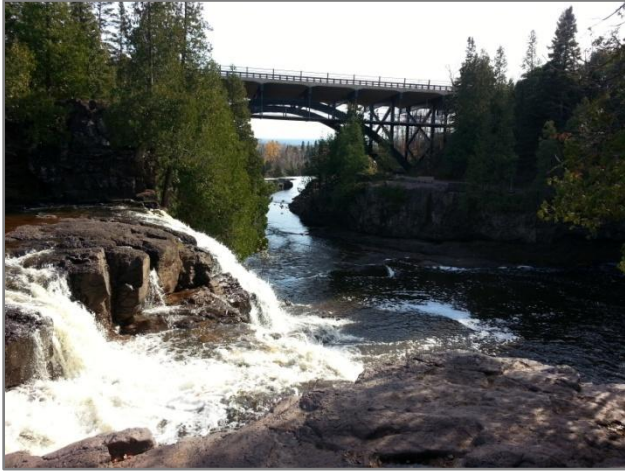
The Pharisees were the “society-makers” of Israel. They expected the Messiah to play by their rules if he wanted to be glorified in their society, but when Jesus came, He wouldn’t play their games, instead exposing them: *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in”* (Matt. 23:13). They demanded He play by their rules if He wanted to progress in their society, *“seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, ‘Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation’”* (Mark 8:11b-12). Jesus would not give them what they wanted, and He compared them to *“children who sit in the market place and call to one another, and they say, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep’”* (Luke 7:31-32).

Just like John the Baptist, Jesus wouldn’t play to the “tune” of their manipulative games, so *“the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many subjects, plotting against Him to catch Him in something He might say”* (Luke 11:52-54). They pursued His death to “win” their game. But they did not realize His death WAS the very will of God—atonement for their sins! Jesus never fought for His own will, like the society-makers of every age—*“He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”* (Phil. 2:8b), for He said, *“I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me”* (John 5:30b).

Jesus didn’t play satan’s games or prostrate Himself to man’s rules to be accepted or glorified by them, for He said, *“it is My Father who glorifies Me”* (John 8:54b)! *“For this reason also, God highly exalted Him”* (Phil 2:9). In these Last Days, we too must not prostrate ourselves to man’s will to receive his acceptance and glory. We wait for Jesus Who will glorify His Church when He returns! Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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No Honor in Your Own Home

“And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household’” (Matthew 13:57 NASB).

Men have always been born under the power of “blood” relations, the will of the flesh, and the will of man. These forces sway us in powerful ways from our youth. Jesus was born under the expectation that He too would submit to these powers. But He didn’t.

Soon after beginning His ministry, Jesus’ family sought to take Him aside: *“While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him”* (Matthew 12:46). Maybe they wanted to “save” Him from embarrassment after He began publicly rebuking the Pharisees. Perhaps they felt His behavior was “dishonoring” them before the people. Whatever the case, they were saying, “Stop what you are doing right now and attend to our will.” But Jesus was not guilty of “dishonoring” His family before God—He honored His Heavenly Father and obeyed God’s law to honor His earthly mother as God desired, even if it wasn’t to His family’s expectations. No matter what Jesus did, He could never do it right in His family’s eyes: *“Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Booths, was near. Therefore His brothers said to Him, ‘Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing. For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.’ For not even His brothers were believing in Him. So Jesus said*

to them, ‘My time is not yet here, but your time is always opportune’” (John 7:2-6). If Jesus focused on His mission, He was “ignoring and disgracing them,” but if He took time to be with them, they criticized Him for not doing things right. Everything was “opportune” to them if it was in their will and timing.

Jesus was persecuted, harassed, and rejected because He didn’t live up to the expectations of His family, community, or society. When He *“came to His hometown and began teaching them in their synagogue”* they took offense because He appealed to His Heavenly Father’s will alone and did not submit to the expectations they had regarding His “blood” relations (Matt. 13:54-58). He could have easily been accepted by them if He did what they wanted Him to do, but He told them, *“I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me”* (John 6:38).

For this reason, He answered the man who told Him to stop preaching and attend to His family’s will: *“‘Who is My mother and who are My brothers?’ And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, ‘Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother’”* (Matthew 12:48-50). Jesus was revealing that God was making a new family—the family of the Heavenly Father, responsible to one another in God’s will, made up of people *“who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God”* (John 1:13). These people are freed from the will of blood relations, flesh, and man—born of the will of God to live for Him as His children—brothers and sisters in God’s household.

Thanks be to God that Jesus didn’t live for His own will, nor the will of His family and community! He lived for His Father’s will, which was that He bring salvation from sin to all mankind—in God’s way and timing. In our own struggles with the will of our blood, our flesh, and man, may we fix our eyes on Christ’s example and “be alive” for the will of our Father in Heaven. Even so, Amen!

Thoughts? _____

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Family Matters

“Even my close friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me” (Psalm 41:9).

Family should be a place of safety. But because of sin, it is often a place of persecution for the Believer. Sometimes in obeying God’s will as a Believer, our friends and family feel we are embarrassing them or dishonoring them (“don’t talk about that here!” ; “why do you make everything difficult?” ; “why can’t you just get along?” ; “You aren’t being a good brother, son, spouse” ; etc). They want us to bend to their expectations concerning our purpose and behavior. We may be in situations where we feel we can “do nothing right” in their eyes. We need to understand that the will of God through Jesus Christ creates division, *“for I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household”* (Matthew 10:35-36). God’s will will always come into conflict with man’s will, and worldly relationships can be broken.

But God didn’t leave us in brokenness. Through Jesus, He made a new family of people who profess to believe in Him and obey Him! This is why we must not forsake fellowship in the family of God! We need the support and encouragement of our spiritual family.

Yet, sometimes the worst injuries for a Believer can actually come from our spiritual relatives in the family of God! How is that possible? The devil loves nothing better than to strike deep into our “safe zones.” As David says, *“for it is not an*

enemy who reproaches me, Then I could bear it; Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me, Then I could hide myself from him. But it is you, a man my equal, my companion and my familiar friend; we who had sweet fellowship together Walked in the house of God in the throng” (Psalm 55:12-14).

Yes, because true Believers do still sin, conflict can come into the Christian home and into the Church. This happens when Believers put their own interests, desires, and will ahead of God’s will. In doing this, they will inevitably come into conflict with fellow Believers seeking to follow God’s will and obey His commands. We must take great care to not persecute our brothers and sisters when their words or actions are in conflict with our will or expectations, but not God’s will as revealed in His Word: *“let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him”* (1 Corinthians 7:17a).

The difference between our natural families and our spiritual family is that our Brothers and Sisters in the Church claim to all be saved—bound through our mutual confession of Jesus Christ to the will of God as revealed in His Word. God’s will in His Word is what judges between us now, and the Holy Spirit in us exposes, convicts, and discerns by it. Therefore, if someone is seeking their own will instead of God’s, it will become apparent through appealing to the Word of God, which will *“judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart”* (Hebrews 4:12).

When we feel shamed, injured, or persecuted by friends, family, or even members of our church, we need to look to Jesus Who didn’t stop obeying His heavenly Father even when it was in opposition to His family’s will, His community’s expectations, and His society’s demands. May the Lord encourage and strengthen us to stand firm in our obedience to His will in all things. May we hold ourselves accountable to His will by His Word, so that in everything we would say, *“If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that”* (James 4:15b). Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Afflicted in Faithfulness

“It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes” (Psalm 119:71).

In this life, the Christian is *“afflicted in every way”* (2 Cor. 4:8a). This is no surprise because Jesus *“was afflicted”* (Isaiah 53:7), and He said, *“a servant is not greater than his master”* (John 13:16a).

Affliction can come in many ways—persecution, illness, pain, relational issues, etc. It can happen for many different reasons, but in them all, it is ALWAYS an opportunity for us to grow closer to God! David always took affliction as a reminder to draw closer to God, regardless of the reason for it: *“I know, O LORD, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me. Let Your steadfast love comfort me according to Your promise to Your servant. Let Your mercy come to me, that I may live; for Your law is my delight”* (Ps. 119:75-77). Sometimes, he had strayed: *“before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word”* (Ps. 119:67). Yes, God *“delivers the afflicted by their affliction and opens their ear by adversity”* (Job 36:15), *“and if they are bound in chains and caught in the cords of affliction, then He declares to them their work and their transgressions, that they are behaving arrogantly. He opens their ears to instruction and commands that they return from iniquity”* (Job 36:8-10).

If there is iniquity in our lives, do we respond to affliction by confronting that iniquity or do we commit greater iniquity by ignoring it? *“Take care; do not turn to iniquity, for this you have chosen rather than affliction”* (Job 36:21). *“The*

godless in heart cherish anger; they do not cry for help when He binds them” (Job 36:13). Affliction can drive people away from God into further sin, but the Believer is to stand firm, because everything God allows is for our good: *“all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose”* (Rom. 8:28b).

While there are temptations to harbor resentment or anger against God and others in affliction, the Believer is instead to delight in the Lord, for *“if your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction”* (Ps. 119:92). Affliction gets our attention. It puts things in perspective, opening our ears and eyes because it is a humbling process, reminding us of our helplessness and the frailty of our form. Success and prosperity can blind us, making us think we can provide for ourselves, but affliction proves to us that it is His strength that keeps us. After all, we were made *“jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed”* (2 Cor. 4:7b-8a) because of His Holy Spirit in us.

No one seeks affliction, but if we are enduring it, we must draw nearer to God, for only He delivers us: *“many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all”* (Ps. 34:19). Our God *“has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and He has not hidden His face from him, but has heard, when he cried to Him”* (Ps. 22:24). *“This is my comfort in my affliction, that Your promise gives me life”* (Ps. 119:50). Christ’s promise in you is *“springing up to eternal life”* (Jn. 4:14)!

May we declare, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too”* (2 Cor. 1:3-5). Let us also comfort the afflicted! Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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All Things Subjected to Us in Christ

“Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life?” (1 Corinthians 6:3)

God has declared *“the end from the beginning”* (Isaiah 46:10a), and in His wisdom, He has determined that lowly man will rule the coming world, not angels. But man cannot partake in the coming world in his current sinful, rebellious state. There has to be a change. God made this possible by *“sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin”* (Romans 8:3) - our sin. Jesus *“became flesh and dwelt among us”* (John 1:14), so that man could be reconciled to God’s purpose and saved from the consequences of his rebellion. Jesus paves the ONLY WAY for mankind to inherit the world to come through HIS inheritance of it and our union with Him as His Bride, the Church.

“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten you’? And again, ‘I will be a Father to Him and He shall be a Son to Me?’ And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, ‘And let all the

angels of God worship Him’” (Hebrews 1:1-6).

“For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. But one has testified somewhere, saying, ‘What is man, that You remember him? Or the Son of Man that You are concerned about Him? You have made him for a little while lower than the angels; You have crowned him over the works of Your hands; You have put all things in subjection under his feet.’ For in subjecting all things to him [man], He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him” (Heb. 2:5-8). Indeed, till this day *“the whole world lies in the power of the evil one”* (1 John 5:19b) - God has allowed the present world and mankind to be subjected to those powers (and their servants) who prey on our rebellion against God—our sin.

But this has changed through Jesus Christ, *“the firstborn among many brethren”* (Rom. 8:29b), for now *“we DO see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him...in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, ‘I will proclaim Your name to My brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing You praise.’ And again, ‘Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me.’ Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives”* (Heb. 2:9-15).

In becoming man, Jesus made it possible for sinful man to inherit God’s promise through Him, if we accept His redemption from sin, and His protection and lordship! Amen!

Thoughts? _____

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Lucifer's Rejection of God's Word—P2

“Bless the Lord, you His angels, Mighty in strength, who perform His word, Obeying the voice of His word!” (Psalm 103:20)

In “*declaring the end from the beginning*” (Isaiah 46:10a), God’s general purpose was clear to the angels, for they were witnesses to the declaration of His Word. Yet God alone knows the details of His purpose.

Lucifer was a great angel, and it is possible that the revelation of God’s plan to “*not subject to angels the world to come*” (Heb. 2:5) but rather to lowly mankind, may have inspired his rebellion against the Word of God.

In Ezekiel, the king of Tyre is compared to Lucifer who “*had the seal [were the one sealing a pattern] of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God...You were the anointed cherub who covers [guards], and I placed you there. You were on the holy mountain of God; you walked in the midst of the stones of fire. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created until unrighteousness was found in you. By the abundance of your trade you were internally filled with violence, and you sinned; therefore I have cast you as profane from the mountain of God. And I have destroyed you, O covering [guarding] cherub, From the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor. I cast you to the ground; I put you before kings, that they may see you*” (Ezekiel 28:12b-19). Lucifer was involved in sealing God’s purpose, in guarding God’s Word, but his pride tempted him to disobedience, and in rebellion he

became the devil, satan: “*behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth*” (Rev. 12:3b-4a), “*the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him*” (Rev. 12:9). “*How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, You who have weakened the nations! But you said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’ Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit*” (Isaiah 14:12-15).

Perhaps God’s declaration in the beginning that lowly mankind was to inherit all things and judge even angels was too much for Lucifer’s pride and caused his rebellion against God’s purpose. This would make sense why he and the fallen angels are so determined to corrupt the affairs of men, rebelling against their duty as “*ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation*” (Hebrews 1:14).

Satan is on a crusade to corrupt mankind from God’s purpose for them, for he was “passed over” to inherit the coming world. Perhaps he tempts man to sin to “demonstrate” God’s “folly” in choosing mankind over angels, for when men fall by his temptations into sin, he turns around and accuses them of their sins before God. In this way, he may think he is justifying his own sin against God by “proving” man is worse than him, but he is in error as we shall see.

In all his “wisdom,” satan could not foresee Jesus Christ—God coming as a man to save mankind from the very sins satan accuses them of! Jesus (as God and man) has inherited everything and believing mankind will inherit the world to come through Him and Him alone.

Thoughts? _____

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Satan, the Accuser of Mankind—P3

“He [God] puts no trust even in His servants; and against His angels He charges error” (Job 4:18).

Satan likely inspires all sin upon the earth to “justify” his sin before God, thinking to demonstrate God’s folly in bequeathing the coming world to mankind (instead of angels) when he can so easily incite them to wickedness.

Satan (lit. the “Accuser” or “Adversary”) “proved” this by tempting Adam and Eve to sin, then accusing them to God. Perhaps he thought in God’s holiness He would destroy man, breaking His Word. But as God’s Word remains unshaken, satan continues his “proofs,” inciting man to commit terrible sins. In all this, satan proves he does not care about anyone but himself, and he is without thought as to who he hurts in the process, thus Jesus says *“he was a murderer from the beginning”* (John 8:44b) and a thief, for *“the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy”* (John 10:10a). He *“prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour”* (1 Peter 5:8b). Satan is intent on condemning the world to death if he thinks he can “justify” himself by it, even if it is only in his own heart.

But Jesus pointed out satan’s folly in thinking he could make himself look righteous by causing others to sin, for *“it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!”* (Matt. 18:7b). Man’s sin is condemned before a holy God, but the one who incites the sin also bears guilt.

Satan especially targets Believers with persecutions and temptations, and he vehemently *“accuses them day and night before our God”* (Rev. 12:10b), for by their obedience to the Word

of God they witness against him. As soon as God pointed out faithful Job, satan immediately set out to tempt him to sin, so that he could accuse Job to God. He also inspired *“Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel”* (Rev. 2:14b), that they would sin and bring God’s destruction upon themselves. Just as Zachariah was shown Joshua the High Priest in filthy garments with *“Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him”* (Zach. 3:1b). Satan tempts and persecutes the righteous because they witness against his unrighteous behavior. Like *“Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous”* (1 John 3:12). In Cain’s mind, he was unjustified in God’s eyes because Abel WAS justified. Rather than seek true acceptance from God, Cain thought removing Abel from the running would make his evil deeds more acceptable to God—what choice would He have? Just as Cain attacked Abel, satan attacks those who seek the good of God—*“those who render me evil for good accuse me because I follow after good”* (Psalm 38:20).

But Jesus warned people who, like satan, persecute and tempt Believers, for *“whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea”* (Matt. 18:6), for *“he who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord”* (Prov. 17:15).

Satan will never be justified before God for what he has done. Despite his mighty works to try and justify himself (condemning mankind by their sins, accusing them before God, and trying to rob them of God’s Word for them), Jesus disarmed all his works at the cross and the open tomb for anyone who accepts Him as their Lord and Savior. *“The devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil”* (1 John 3:8b). And He will! Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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God's Plan of Exalting the Humble—P4

“Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Matt. 23:12).

As Lord over all things, God has chosen in His wisdom that among His creation, *“the greatest among you shall be your servant”* (Matt. 23:11). God had planned this from the beginning, that His mighty angels would *“serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation”* (Hebrews 1:14b), but satan did not like it. He did not trust that God's plan of putting everything in subjection to man would be good for creation, especially the angels. In satan's “wisdom,” the “smartest” or “strongest” should be in charge—perhaps he thought God was showing folly or weakness by the declaration of His Word concerning mankind. Rather than obey God's Word, he took matters into his own hands! But God told him, *“you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor”* (Ezekiel 28:17b).

In the service of his own will, satan not only wanted to maintain his splendor but also to exalt himself further by taking what had not been given to him: *“You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high...I will make myself like the Most High’”* (Isaiah 14:13-14). When satan inspired King Saul's rebelliousness, God told Saul, *“rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king”* (1 Sam. 15:23). Like Saul, satan presumed he knew God's purpose, just as he presumed his way was better. Rather than trust God in humility, satan rejected God's Word in rebellion, choosing to serve his own will instead.

But he learned that while *“the Lord lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked to the ground”* (Ps. 147:6), for *“You save a humble people, but Your eyes are on the haughty to bring them down”* (2 Sam. 22:28). Unlike satan who rejected God's Word, God says He looks to the one *“who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at My word”* (Isaiah 66:1-2). Satan was cast to the earth, where he has inspired the “religion of rebellion” against God's Word. In all his labors in the earth and his rule of this present world, he teaches men to rise by taking what they want through craft and force (deceit, theft, incrimination, violence, murder). To this day, we see that in satan's kingdom *“the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them”* (Matt. 20:25b), rather than the great serving the lesser as God decreed.

Satan's presumption misjudged God's plan that He would reveal in Jesus. This revelation was not entirely clear to the angels from the beginning, for God's plan of salvation for mankind involved *“things into which angels long to look [gain a clear glimpse]”* (1 Peter 1:12). In his presumption, he did not see that God purposely *“chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God”* (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). Truly *“the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, ‘He catches the wise in their craftiness’”* (1 Cor. 3:19). Just so, God caught satan in his craftiness.

Satan, who wouldn't even serve mankind because of his pride, did not understand that God Himself would not only come into the world to serve mankind, but give His life for mankind to save them from the power of sin that satan had inflicted on them—the very Word of God he had rebelled against would come into the world as God's Son. Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Jesus, the Savior of Mankind—P5

“Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).

For the sake of his *“splendor”* (Ez. 28:17), satan would not serve God’s plan for mankind—he rejected God’s Word for himself and then inspired mankind to sin in an attempt to undo God’s Word for them, which had promised that they would inherit the world to come, not angels. His gambit required him to inspire great sin in the earth, but he thought he could justify himself by causing the whole world to condemn itself, for he knew that Holy God would not give the coming world to sinners.

Satan was likely confident that nothing short of destroying mankind could undo the power of sin, and if God allowed man to continue in sin, they could not inherit the coming world, so either way, God would have to break His Word concerning mankind, and satan would win in his argument against God. Yet because he presumed he knew God’s purpose, he was taken completely by surprise with God’s answer, for God’s Word went forth unhindered: *“From the heavens You uttered judgment; the earth feared and was still, when God arose to establish judgment, to save all the humble of the earth. Selah”* (Psalm 76:8-9). In the proper time, God showed how much He *“loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him”* (John 3:16-17).

God’s Son was His plan all along to destroy satan’s work of condemning every man and woman through their sins. The Son of God came to save, not to condemn, and He would restore God’s design for humility and service in His creation, which satan had rejected. Indeed, in satan’s “wisdom” the smartest and strongest deserve what they can take, and by his guidance, *“the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them [the people], and their great ones exercise authority over them,”* but God’s command was, *“It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many”* (Matt. 20:25-28).

It would have seemed utter nonsense to satan that Almighty God would come down into the world as a Son of Man to pay the price for the sins he had inspired men to do. Yet, God did just that, for the Son of Man is Jesus Christ *“who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name”* (Phil. 2:6-9), thus it is declared to Jesus in heaven, *“You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth”* (Rev. 5:9-10). Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s Word from the beginning to give the coming world to mankind—those that believe on Him.

Of old God said, *“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart’...For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men”* (1 Cor. 1:18-25), just as it is wiser and stronger than angels. Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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The Revelation of God's Mystery—P6

“Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ*; and He will reign forever and ever’” (Rev. 11:15).

From the beginning, God's Word is wiser and stronger than any power in His creation, for *“in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”* (John 1:1). God promised by His Word that mankind would inherit the coming world and that the angels would serve them.

Satan rebelled and enslaved mankind to condemnation through sin, separating man from the presence and life of Holy God, bringing spiritual and physical death. By condemning all mankind to death, he thought to subvert the Word of God. For a time, satan may have thought he succeeded, but then an unexpected thing happened— *“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14). Man is flesh and blood, so the Word *“Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives”* (Heb. 2:14-15).

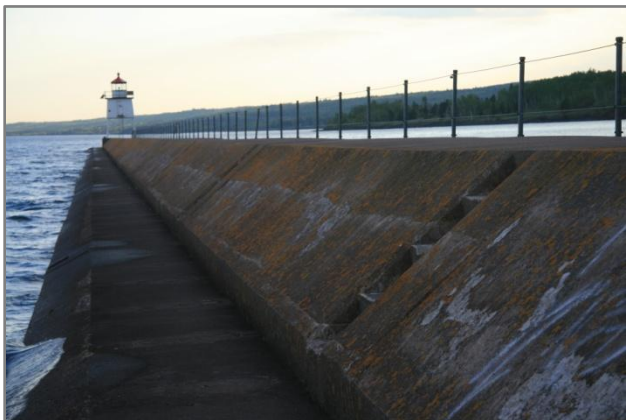
The details of God's plan from the beginning were unclear to angels, and Lucifer presumed incorrectly that in regards to mankind it was all or nothing. By the truth of His Word, God never promised the coming world to ALL mankind—just as God promised that Israel would be saved, but not ALL Israelites were saved, only those who were

spiritually of Abraham's seed—those who have faith in God, for *“a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit”* (Rom. 2:29a). God always preserves a remnant— *“so too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace”* (Rom. 11:5). Through Jesus, God opened a way for anyone who inwardly sought Him to come out from the condemnation of sin into His family, for *“all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God”* (John 1:12-13), for *“if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved”* (Rom. 10:9). So that at the proper time it was brought *“to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places”* (Eph. 3:9-10). Satan's rebellion proves pointless and his scheme to condemn all mankind is undone, for in *“all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom. 8:37-39),

In our salvation, God's promise and His Word are proven true, and we can hold fast to His Word concerning our future, things that *“no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him”* (1 Cor. 2:9), *“so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus”* (Eph. 2:7), for we *“will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years”* (Revelation 20:6b), and after that, we *“will reign forever and ever”* (Rev. 22:5b). Praise God! Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Stand Firm in God's Word—P7

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

Man's sin condemns us all to spiritual darkness and death—our nature has been twisted so we cannot help ourselves but to sin against God. By inciting man to sin, satan tried to thwart God's Word for mankind, as he was sure God could not save mankind without denying His Word. But God answered satan with His Son Jesus Christ, Who is the one and only way for man to come out from under sin's condemnation. Through Jesus, mankind can *“open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me”* (Acts 26:18).

Believers are a remnant of mankind, having received a place in the Church—those set apart for God by faith in Jesus. And God has put the Church on display in the world as a fulfillment of His Word, for *“we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men”* (1 Cor. 4:9b). The Church lives for God, freed from the spiritual power of the kingdom of darkness and the direct power of satan, by Jesus. For when God revealed Jesus, *“He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him”* (Col. 2:15).

Yet as we are exhibited in this life, the world treats us *“like men sentenced to death”* (1 Cor. 4:9a), *“like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things”* (1 Cor. 4:13b), for rather than profiting satan's kingdom, we (like Job) are a witness against it and a testimony of its inevitable judgment. Thus, satan causes Believers difficulty in any way he can

while we are still in the flesh, through persecution, illness, or temptation, that we might be sifted *“like wheat”* (Lk. 22:31b).

As Believers, we have obtained eternal salvation, but satan knows there are painful consequences for sin in this life and at the judgment seat of Christ. Just as *“satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel”* (1 Chron. 21:1), he stands against the Church, trying to bring the consequences of sin upon us by inciting us to sin—like the prophet Balaam, *“who loved gain from wrongdoing”* (2 Peter 2:15b) by inciting people to sin. Just as he tempted Jesus, satan waits *“until an opportune time”* (Lk. 4:13b), and even *“disguises himself as an angel of light”* and *“his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness”* (2 Cor. 11:14b-15), so that *“as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ”* (1 Cor. 11:3). This is why we are to *“give no opportunity to the devil”* (Eph. 4:27b). How do we do that?

By submitting to God's Spirit and His Word you are putting *“on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil”* (Eph. 6:11), *“rightly handling”* (2 Tim. 2:15) *“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”* (Eph. 6:17b), for it *“is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart”* (Heb. 4:12). *“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words”* (Rom. 8:26). It is God *“who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Cor. 15:57), not ourselves, and He *“will soon crush Satan under your feet”* (Rom. 16:20a).

Surely, *“the word of our God will stand forever”* (Isaiah 40:8b) no matter who stands against it! Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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“May we remember to offer acceptable worship to God and live life with a reverence and awe at the unshakable future we have stored up for us in Heaven. We need to recall this in the worries of our daily lives. May the Holy Spirit testify in us and through us a simple and pure devotion to Christ, that we would worship Him in reverence and awe for His wonderful salvation. May He inspire us to a deeper love and understanding of His Gospel and a deeper commitment in our witness to the world as His lights.”

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