

Stepping Stones to Salvation Success

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Stepping Stones to Salvation Success

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At this point I need to express a very special thanks to all of the people who have contributed to my series of books, both directly and indirectly: First and foremost, His most wondrous of gifts--my wife Janet and the incredible blessings from the Lord as I continue to write this series of books. Next, all of the help and spiritual growth I received from attending and ministering in the Lord's non-instrumental churches: McPherson Church of Christ, Council Bluffs; Redline Church of Christ, Harlan, Iowa and Harlan Church of Christ. Also the instrumental churches: First Christian Church, Council Bluffs, Iowa; my home congregation--East Side Christian Church, Council Bluffs. And finally: my family, Kathleen Kachulas, and many other wonderful friends and brethren, and my nephew David West who offered his professional web design services. I truly appreciate all of their help and encouragement.

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose trust is the Lord. For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought no cease to yield fruit.

Jeremiah 17:7-8

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Statement of Purpose

In mid-nineteen nineties I set out to research what took place when I first decided to obey the Gospel. The interest reaches back to 1978. This is when I first heard the gospel message from a preacher who served in a Council Bluffs, Iowa, Church of Christ – noninstrumental. My wife Janet had quietly and very effectively led me to attend this church and respond to the Lord’s call. Throughout our dating and engagement she consistently modeled a Christian woman, greatly influencing my interest in the Lord. She never stopped.

The minister taught me the basics of salvation and I chose to answer the Lord’s call. From this moment I became increasingly interested in learning what took place and began a systematic study of salvation. As I accumulated more knowledge and research information the thought occurred to me to share what I have learned. Thus my book began to take shape from a rough outline to a manuscript.

Through many years of writing I included other books and ending up with a series of books in various stages of completion. They speak about salvation, sin, the Lord’s work of salvation, the covenant, and an overview book.

The books include the integration of many different types of theology: theology – information about God, Christology – the work of Jesus, pneumatology – what the Holy Spirit is doing, ecclesiatology – about the Lord’s church, anthropology – mankind’s response and accountability to God, soteriology – the process of salvation, and eschatology – concerning the end of time and eternal life in the body of Christ.

This book is the overview. I have organized the chapters to briefly look at many differing aspects of salvation. It has nine chapters which include basic steps of information leading to a greater insight about God, what takes place when responding to His free offer of salvation in Christ, and spiritual confidence.

The parts of each chapter are like stepping stones, one of many crossing a stream of spiritual water. As the reader progresses from one step to another he will begin to grow in a better understanding concerning his present fellowship with Jesus and knowledge of what lies ahead. Once he reaches the other side he is able to look back across the stream and see the wonders of God’s grace. He is better equipped to recognize his participation and partnership in the Lord’s eternal plan.

I sincerely hope this information becomes as useful to the reader as it is for me the writer. May God richly bless your efforts to understand the blessings of salvation which the Lord so lovingly gave to all humanity. I pray God will give you the confidence and faith to witness the wondrous grace of God to the lost and fellow servant’s in the Lord.

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Section Two: God Speaks To His People

The universal Word

In order to respond to God for redemption there must be an accurate and truthful communication from God to mankind which reveals the expectations, blessings, and judgments of the New Covenant of Christ. All New Covenant Scripture, including all Scripture written before His death, originated from Jesus Christ, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (*Romans 10:17*). Regardless of what many people believe, there is but one common word given by God to all of mankind.

In the first century every person who heard God's word, regardless of where they lived, listened to the same gospel and learned about the same New Covenant. He required all to respond with the same belief, faith, confession, committed repentance, obedience leading to baptism, and life of faith in the faith found in the New Covenant. The Lord has but one will and Jesus only authored one covenant for which He died a single death for all people of all ages.

God has inspired the writers of the Scriptures to communicate His will, and His will is the same for everyone. It is steadfast and consistent just as He is never changing. Towards the end of the first century *Jude* spoke of the unity of salvation in his short letter, "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (*Jude 3*). He spoke of at least two major scriptural truths about the Lord's revelation to those ready to appeal to Him for salvation and those purchased by Him:

1) There is but one salvation, a "common salvation." If there are two differing ways of salvation being taught then one or both are wrong and the word of God needs carefully researched for the right answer. Paul spoke of the dangers of preaching a deliberately changed gospel message in his letter to the *Galatians*: "But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (1:8).

Some people may preach the gospel differently out of ignorance of the truth. But their lack of knowledge concerning the gospel cannot change the unalterable and singular nature of the message or cancel out the curse. Misapplied Scripture cannot help those who hear and obey what they believe is God's redemptive call according to the New Covenant will of Christ. Therefore, they may not receive redemption from Christ. As a result these people could easily end up believing they are saved by Jesus while still enslaved to their sin and separated from God. Salvation is based upon faith, which by its definition cannot sense anything spiritual. Assurance of salvation only comes from Scripture, not feelings, physical evidence, or perceived miracles.

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Section Two: God Speaks To His People

The universal Word

All of God's inspired communication ended with the death of His apostles. If any person deliberately adds or takes away from Scripture he is violating the integrity of God's word thus corrupting both the Lord's New Covenant faith and faith in the faith. Everyone, especially preachers and teachers need to pay very careful attention about unintentionally delivering a false message in the Lord's name.

2) Jude mentioned "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints". He clearly revealed how the Spirit delivered the gospel message to the apostles and New Covenant writers in order for them to accurately preach to those who are lost in sin and counsel the saints. The message remained the same regardless of where the Lord's servants taught it and to whom. The gospel message remains the same as time marches on into the future. Paul stated the word of God must not be changed in order to teach in any other manner other than originally delivered by the apostles. Scripture does not evolve with history. History evolves within the parameters of God's word and will.

Paul wrote in his *first* letter to the *Corinthians*: "I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church" (4:17). His gospel message remained consistent with what Jesus first taught him, "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached to me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (*Galatians* 1:11-12). His message remained the same as all of the other inspired apostles and writers. A few years later in his letter to the *Colossians* he reminded them of the message "which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you, just as in all the world" (1:5b-6a).

The message of the gospel is cohesive in both content and purpose. And regardless of where the servant's of the Lord preach and teach the word, His gospel always remains the same. The gospel is the New Covenant faith established by Jesus Christ, "proclaimed in all creation under heaven" in the first century (*Colossians* 1:23b). The work of the gospel message will continue the task of bringing people to Christ for redemption according to the revealed will of God worldwide. It will go on to lead the redeemed through life in sanctification until physical death or the return of Christ.

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Section Two: God Speaks To His People

Questions

The Universal Word

All Scripture comes from Jesus.

Romans 10:17

- 1) Do you believe Jesus is the source of all Scripture?
- 2) Who do you think Scripture comes from?

Scripture communicates God's common will.

Jude 3; 1 Corinthians 4:17; Galatians 1:11-12; Colossians 1:5b-6a, 1:23b

- 1) Do you think God is communicating the same thing throughout the world and history?
- 2) What is God trying to communicate to you?
- 3) Is God trying to communicate to you personally?

Scripture must be carefully taught.

Galatians 1:8

- 1) How thoughtful do you study?
- 2) How do you share what you learn about God?
- 3) Do you determine your understanding of God's word: by feelings, what other people say, systematic study, or something else?
- 4) Is Scripture too complicated for personal study?
- 5) How in-depth should you study?
- 6) Is Scripture study important to you?
- 7) How do you prove its importance in your life?

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Section Two: God Speaks To His People

His Mystery

Although God continually communicated to His people throughout the ages, many of the prophecies concerning the new age of Israel and the Messiah remained a mystery, even to His prophets. These prophecies, including those concerning the Messiah, the restored Israel, and the New Covenant would not be clearly understood until their fulfillment by the Messiah, Jesus Christ many hundreds of years later.

Matthew recorded Jesus teaching His disciples, "But blessed are your eyes because they see; and your ears because they hear. For truly I say to you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it; and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it" (13:16-17).

God did not deliberately make these prophecies difficult to understand. He revealed many prophecies as He tried to warn His people of the consequences of repeated patterns of sin and spiritual compromise. God wanted the mystery prophecies taken by faith in the wisdom of His word, especially prophecy concerning the Messiah and His restoration of Israel.

The mystery of the gospel depends upon belief in the word of God as truth, and faith in God's truth by observing its counsel despite the difficulty of understanding many of the details. *Peter* noted this in his *first* letter, "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the suffering of Christ and the glories to follow" (1:10-11). The prophets knew the promise and prophecies pointed to the Messiah, but the mystery left them uncertain about when He would appear, how, and the purpose of His appearance. Much of their confusion seemed to originate from a literal interpretation of prophecy indicating a utopian physical state of Israel, the restoration of the physical kingdom and king, and world domination.

The mystery hidden within the words God communicated to His people a message of grace revealed by the Messiah--Jesus. Paul wrote in *Ephesians*, "He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He proposed in Him" (1:9).

In his *first* letter to the *Corinthians*, Paul explained: "But we speak in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages of our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age had understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory ... for to us God revealed them through the Spirit" (2:7-10).

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Section Two: God Speaks To His People

His Mystery

Had the rulers understood the mystery, they could have chosen to treat Jesus differently, which would have altered history and the flow of the promise. God used the ignorance and sin of the people to accomplish His will for the salvation of His chosen people. He foreknew how they would respond to Jesus and used their response to fulfill His purpose in Jesus.

The puzzling meaning of the mission and purpose of the Messiah may have also prevented Satan from correctly influencing the people who put Jesus to death. Jesus had to offer His sinless life, the ultimate sacrificial lamb for all sin, in order to defeat Satan, the power of sin, and the curse of spiritual death. In his enthusiasm to kill Jesus he ended up setting himself up for total defeat.

After His death, burial, and resurrection, and ascension, Jesus sent the Spirit to fully reveal the mystery to His apostles. Paul wrote in *Romans*: “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to My Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but is now manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all nations, leading to obedience of faith” (16:25-26).

He also mentioned in *Ephesians* the inconceivability of the mystery to the Jewish people due to cultural, spiritual, and racial prejudices. No Jew would have ever considered the possibility of Gentiles being united with them as “fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (3:6).

Sin had caused the Jewish people to lose their God-given focus to remain a separated people from the world in order to witness His light to the world. Instead they chose to focus their attention on conforming to the world. As a result they began to compromise their original purpose of being God’s people to serve Him only and provide a way for the fulfillment of the promise reaffirmed to Abraham. They chose to give up their uniqueness which often gave cause to the Gentiles to disrespect and mock God.

Many of the Jews believed God set them apart as a special people and felt entitled and special in God’s plan regardless of their lifestyle and worship choices. They could do no wrong; resulting from an attitude of prideful exclusiveness. They assumed the assurance of their salvation. The deception of assurance caused by sin hindered a true understanding of their intended purpose and the meaning of the promise. They believed the “seed” referred exclusively to the physical nation of Israel.

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His Mystery

The mystery of the Scriptures revealed God's universal plan of salvation through Jesus Christ; specifically the time when: "The deliverer will come from Zion. He will remove ungodliness from Jacob. And this is My Covenant with them, when I take away their sins" (*Romans* 11: 26b-27). Hundreds of years earlier the Spirit inspired *Isaiah* to foretell--when the Messiah reveals the mystery: "all of Israel will be saved" (11:26a). According to *Isaiah* the Israel Paul spoke of is included in a New Covenant and cleansed of all sin. This Israel is spiritual and one with Christ, for it is the body of Christ. The spiritual state of Israel also includes all of the saints of old.

Jesus fulfilled at least five major signs in this prophecy from *Isaiah*:

- 1) The Messiah's deliverance will come from Jerusalem.
- 2) The deliverance is spiritual; the sin of Israel will be removed.
- 3) The Messiah will make a new covenant with Israel.
- 4) The covenant will include only forgiven people who have agreed to covenant with Him.
- 5) Israel will be a united people. The citizens of Israel are exclusively those who have covenanted with God in the New Covenant.

The mystery is revealed and it's very important to understand the nature of His word, it's one, not many, or one with many interpretations based upon culturally influenced perceptions of what He communicated. After His resurrection Jesus clearly communicated His mystery and its intended meaning. Its revelation does not depend upon any servant's ability to understand what is being revealed. In *1 Corinthians* Paul wrote: "And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (2:4-5). His word fully and finally reveals the promise and the long hidden mystery of the gospel.

Questions

His Mystery

Even the prophets didn't understand many prophetic visions.
Matthew 13:16-17; *1 Peter* 1:10-11

- 1) Why do you think God keeps details about the Messiah hidden?
- 2) Are there things in Scripture you do not understand?

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Questions

His Mystery

- 3) Do you ever try to understand what is difficult to figure out?
- 4) Why do you think God created Scripture in such a way to demand study in order to understand His will?

Jesus personally revealed the mystery.
Ephesians 1:9

- 1) Did Jesus reveal the complete mystery during His ministry?
- 2) Do you think the mystery is completely revealed or is there more?

After His resurrection Jesus continued His revelation through the Holy Spirit.
1 Corinthians 2:7-10; Romans 16:25-26

- 1) Who did Jesus reveal the rest of the mystery through?
- 2) Why is knowing this about the mystery important to you?

Sin played a major role in developing Jewish ignorance about their Messiah's true mission.
Galatians 3:6; Romans 11:26b-27; Isaiah 11:26a

- 1) During the Lord's ministry feelings concerning Jewish pride, exclusiveness, nationalism, and tradition played a major role. Concerning the Lord's will how important are feelings?
- 2) Are feelings from the heart able to compromise God's word?
- 3) How important is tradition to you?
- 4) How important are cultural perceptions of what Scripture reveals?
- 5) Are the writings of Bible scholars a substitute for personal Bible study?

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Questions

His Mystery

It is very easy to mix world-viewpoints with Scriptural truth.

1 Corinthians 2:4-5, 14-16; Ephesians 4:14

- 1) How much do you depend upon other sources than Scripture to learn about God?
- 2) Do you think a servant who has not received the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is able to understand Scripture?
- 3) Can a Christian mix world viewpoints with Scriptural counsel in order to make the best of both worlds?
- 4) How do you handle conflicting points of view on important passages of Scripture?

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Section Two: God Speaks To His People

The Revealed Mystery

The words of God are in written form for common people to read and understand anywhere in the world during any generation, whether it's the first century or the fortieth century. Jesus said: "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death" (*John* 8:51). He spoke to any person willing to listen with open ears. The words of God are powerful and have the ability to reach into a person's heart in ways unknown to man.

The writer of *Hebrews* revealed: "The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (4:12). The writer tried to make known something very mysterious about the word of God. Scriptures are not just letters and prophetic works arranged together to form another well written book. The words actually have a life of their own. God designed His word to work within the framework of His creation on a spiritual level simply inconceivable to understand. *Isaiah* noted God saying, "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there without watering the earth, and making it bear and sprout, and furnishes seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it" (55:10-11).

God's word is truth or He is a liar. It's very simple. There are no gray areas of questionable truth. There is no other source of spiritual information in the world able to explain the unexplainable realities of the invisible spiritual realm to physical people. Up to the time of the Lord's visitation, no one has ever witnessed heaven. *John* quoted Jesus stating: "And no one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven" (3:13). Only Jesus has seen heaven because He has always existed, He is God.

The words of God are not of human origin, even though God communicated His will through many different people and ways. Paul stated in his *first* letter to the *Corinthians*: "And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (2:4-5).

Faith is not developed from the evidences of sight, historical discoveries, or from human experience, but exclusively upon the word of Jesus Christ, "So faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ (*Romans* 10:17). Just because God chose to use people and other various ways to reveal His mystery to Israel and the rest of mankind, it does not mean the word is compromised in its integrity and preservation because of people. The continuance of Scriptural integrity witnesses the power of God and how He works within the human experience.

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The word of God helps grow faith because it reveals the expectations of His will, “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (*Hebrews* 11:1).

In his *second* letter, *Timothy* noted: “all Scripture is inspired by God” (3:16a), which of course left out all other writings claiming to have originated from a supernatural source, other than His appointed prophets and the apostles who lived in the first century. The writer of *Hebrews* tried to explain the divine origin of the process of revelation and its delivery throughout the early ages of mankind. He wrote: “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 He also made the world” (1:1-2). Throughout the ages the prophets of old spoke of the coming Messiah and a new restored nation of Israel. Later Jesus began to reveal the mystery and what the prophets truly meant. Through the words of the Lord, His prophets, and apostles, God began to reveal the mystery hidden within His Scriptures.

In *Acts*, Peter bluntly stated to his fellow-Jews: “Moses said, ‘The Lord God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed in everything He says to you. And it shall be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people’” (3:22-23). God began to reveal His mystery through Jesus Christ--the prophet spoken of in the prophecy. The Jewish people did not reject Jesus because of ignorance of God’s will. They knew Scripture well, but spiritual traditions, prejudices, pride, and a general refusal to comprehend spiritual truth from God prevented them from seeing and hearing what Jesus revealed.

Peter’s admonition about the seriousness of listening to Scripture brings to mind a warning Jesus gave to His people, “And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I warn you whom to fear: fear Him who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him” (*Luke* 12:4-5). The point Jesus expressed is: respect for the words of God is an expression of a servant’s fear of the Lord.

Peter revealed at least four major insights about God’s revealed mystery:

- 1) The Prophet Jesus will lead His people to freedom.
- 2) In order to serve or “heed” Jesus a servant of sin must be willing to leave his old life, cross a spiritual sea, enter into a new land and life, and not look back.
- 3) The word of the Lord is more important than any legal or traditional stipulation created by men to protect the practice of faith in God.
- 4) Any servant who refuses to cross over to the Lord’s new land and freedom will continue to receive God’s wrath.

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One thing very important to understand, the words written in Scripture are not sourced from human wisdom. Faith is utterly dependent upon the integrity of God's word. The words of God are real and they offer divine guidance simply not available from any other source. They express His will and are communicated by an understandable message of spiritual realities otherwise impossible to reliably understand. *James* wrote: "in the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth" (1:18a).

A reliable source of spiritual truth is essential. The only other alternative is human wisdom written in the form of divine truth originating from imaginations only able in the best of circumstances, to guess about the spiritual realities they try to describe.

The words of God have purpose. They are meant to give a truthful look at His spiritual reality through an understandable look at how spiritual realities directly affect people within their lives before and after death. His words are a reliable guide to describe and demonstrate how the redemptive process works, how He works within the process, and a realistic look at mankind's responsibilities, accountability to Him, and how to serve Him. His words offer true insight into the realities of sin, separation from God's personal presence, and the work of Satan in his dominion--the world.

The words of God must not be underestimated or mocked as mere myth and superstition. There is much more going on in the invisible spiritual world than is realized and one's eternal destiny will be determined by his attitude and response to the revealed will of Jesus Christ. The word of God is one with Him. How His word is treated in a servant's personal life is a reflection of his attitude towards God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

The words of God are meant to communicate divine wisdom. They are a spiritual how-to-guide designed by God to direct people to Him in an understandable way. *Peter* wrote in his *second* book: "Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence" (1:3).

Why would God do this? *Peter* explained the reason in the next verse: "For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust" (1:4).

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God gave humanity the gift of His word in order to offer a true source “of the faith and of the sound doctrine” (*I Timothy* 4:6). The words of God offer insight into the unseen spiritual realm, a reality otherwise known only partially through instinct, spiritual experiences, and everything created. Human wisdom is only capable of leading people into false perceptions of spiritual truth--who God is, and what His will desires.

Instinct or heart feelings cannot be trusted because of the damage sin and corruption inflict upon the heart. In *Proverbs*, the writer counseled, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding” (3:5). “I feel” or “my heart tells me” does not work with God. He strongly advises against allowing the heart to lead understanding, “for the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (*Genesis* 8:21b). Hundreds of years before the Lord’s birth the Spirit inspired *Jeremiah* to reveal a blunt truth about the spiritual insight of all people, “every man is stupid, devoid of knowledge” (10:14a). This is a basic reason why so many religions and idol worship begin and flourish.

The Lord encourages all servants to exert a full effort of heart to the pursuit of understanding God’s word which develops wisdom. Wisdom itself cries out to anyone who will listen, “My son, if you will receive my sayings, and treasure my commandments within you ... then you will discern the fear of the Lord, and discover the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding” (*Proverbs* 2:1, 5).

What many believe as spiritual truth from other sources is corrupted by an infinite degree of deception and untruth which is impossible to confirm. The beholder of the incorrect information will have no perception of right or wrong regarding spiritual truth because he does not have a true spiritual standard to judge his perceptions. Outside of Scripture a true spiritual understanding of God is impossible.

God communicated to mankind in order to offer insight into His will, especially so through the Messiah--Jesus. *Luke* recorded Jesus stating “blessed are those who hear the word of God, and observe it” (11:28b). Jesus tried to tell His people they needed to actively listen to Him. All of their lives the people learned from their religious leaders to observe God’s will according to human interpretation and tradition disguised by weavings of Scripture. Their spiritual mistakes grew progressively more serious through the ages as they slowly began to rely on tradition and commentary on Scripture, instead of Scripture with a bit of commentary included. They often tried to worship the method rather than the source.

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Jesus told the Jewish people to listen up, they needed to hear Scripture and determine for themselves the will of God. Commentary and tradition are fine but they are not God's word. It's very well for someone of higher learning to explain difficult passages of Scripture, but they are not perfect and their comments often reflect how and what they learned from generations of earlier scholars as well as personal experiences in life. To listen is to observe and an accurate examination of spiritual state of being can only take place when one is willing to pay closer attention to Jesus and Scripture, rather than a human interpretation of what He said.

John also recorded Jesus speaking about the importance of the word of God, its link with spiritual life during life, and a servant's attitude towards God's word in order to realize the link, "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death" (8:51). The only way to understand how God gives eternal life is to first understand what He is requiring in order to receive eternal life. God's grace of freedom requires the combined effort of belief and faith which results in submissive obedience to God the Father through God the Son – Jesus Christ.

Even though the grace of salvation is a gift from God it is dependent upon His conditions. The Jews could not have received redemption from the Egyptians if they chose to refuse to cross the Red Sea. Soon after crossing the sea Moses, "sang this song to the Lord ... 'Who is like Thee among the gods, O Lord? Thou didst stretch out Thy right hand, the earth swallowed them. In Thy kindness Thou hast led the people whom Thou hast redeemed; in Thy great strength Thou hast guided them to Thy holy habitation'" (Exodus 15:1a, 11a, 12-13).

Salvation cannot be separated from righteousness. If a person wants to spend eternity with God he must somehow be made pure and holy – righteous before God. A servant of sin must be willing to allow the Lord to lead him from his life in the oppression of sin and Satan to the freedom of His spiritual holy land. God has revealed to His people how to receive righteousness, but they must first understand His will, and demonstrate a willingness to serve His will instead of the god's of the world. The only way to learn how to serve Him is through His word which clearly explains His will.

Paul later wrote in his letter to the *Romans*: "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (15:4). These are words Jesus desperately tried to teach His people.

Hope is often grounded upon the sand of false or compromised spiritual realities perceived as truth. Spiritual expectations without a solid foundation consumed many of His listeners. Jesus understood how easily false hope is whitewashed and made to look as if it came directly from Scripture.

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But if one looks closer the reality of death in disguise appears. This is a type of pseudo hope which many in the world cherish. It's weak, dependent upon physical circumstances, and dies with physical death.

Jesus tried to illustrate this spiritual reality in a parable, "And every one who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rains descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against the house; and it fell, and great was its fall" (*Matthew* 7:26-27). In other words, a spiritual house is only as strong as its foundation.

Paul helped to reveal the second type of hopeful expectation, which Jesus tried to impress upon His people. It requires a different look at God, an often uncomfortable look at truth from God's point of view. The listener must go beyond his comfort zone of pseudo-faith in self to true-faith. The unseen work of God is detailed in His word, true hope can be achieved if based upon ones faith; He is in control of life. In Christ Jesus expectations end as hoped for, there are no surprises.

God sent Jesus to mankind for the specific purpose of releasing as many people as possible from slavery to sin enabling them to glorify their One true God and receive the rewards of the promise. The words of God are meant to fulfill this purpose. But the world will do its best to discourage every step of the way.

Paul noted in *1 Corinthians*: "For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1:18). The point is: who to believe--God or the wisdom of mankind. This is an ageless quandary confronting every servant of sin regardless of his perception of God. At times the choice even affects the Lord's servant. Wisdom is a very powerful spiritual tool and can be used to destroy or build.

Paul goes on to say, "the world through its wisdom did not come to know God" (1:21a). This fact alone stresses the vital importance of the words of God found in Scripture. Before truth is revealed no one is able to understand the reality of their true spiritual state in sin. Sin cannot be perceived. Sin is an unseen spiritual reality which cannot be understood because it is not sensed. There is no physical evidence of its existence. The knowledge and wisdom found in the world will never reveal the truth about sin. All spiritual information from the world is assumed and conveys an intentional communication: it disguises the deadly reality of sin debt to God even if it attacks sin.

In his *second* letter to the *Corinthians* Paul revealed a very discomfoting spiritual reality about the world and its spiritual leader, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of

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Christ, who is the image of God" (4:3-4). The "god of this world is Satan, and the world is "the dominion of Satan" (Acts 26:18a). And every person who is a slave of sin unwittingly serves him as god, "you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air" – Satan (Ephesians 2:2a).

One of the ways he accomplishes this is by his very clever manipulation of one's own pride before God, "For indeed the Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom" (1 *Corinthians* 1:22). The need to confirm His word with supernatural signs or physical evidence is a subtle rejection of faith in the unseen realities of God's presence. Wisdom from the world is opposed to the word of God. Both the desire to see proof and the self-rationalization of needing to hear the world's point of view concerning spiritual realities may originate from a desire to satisfy pride. The servant of sin believes he knows better than God. It all leads to eternal death.

Only God is able to explain sin, righteousness, and freedom of eternal self-determination. And He alone chooses to explain what He wants to communicate. After all, people are a part of His creation, everyone belongs to Him. Paul revealed this fact of life to an audience of Athenian leaders when he said, "He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring'" (*Acts* 17:28b). Everyone has descended from Adam and Eve – whom God created.

Even though God has left countless witnesses shining in the sky and impossibly creative work on earth, their witness alone cannot lead anyone to a full knowledge of salvation in Christ Jesus. His physical creation needs help to guide people to God and witness the reality of His being. His creation silently speaks of His glory. But it is unable to clearly communicate His redemptive will for mankind. This witness when compromised with human wisdom often leads to false religious beliefs and religions.

Even though every person has a basic moral instinct – the "knowledge of good and evil," a moral life cannot lead any one to obey the will of Jesus as stated in His New Covenant (*Genesis* 2:17a). A moral and benevolent life is not that same as sinless righteousness. Human philosophy may lead people to speculate on spiritual matters and concepts but it cannot lead to God's will in Christ Jesus. Regardless of what degree of wisdom one receives from the world he will never be able to perceive a correct understanding of God's will until he reads and hears God's will.

John quoted Jesus stating: "when the dead shall hear the words of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live," he spoke about people who are dead in sin because they are separated from fellowship with God, not physically dead people (5:25b). They lost the innocence and righteousness given at birth. These people continue to live the same physically, but spiritually life is far different. They serve sin and the god of this world,

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not God the Father. Only the words of God provide the divine wisdom necessary and “able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15).

The Jewish people of Paul’s time should have known this, for “Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins” (*Acts* 10:43). The eternal purpose of Scripture will always be the salvation of as many people as possible. For this is the will of God. He did not create mankind to watch them destroy themselves in sin. He created mankind to live in fellowship with Him which in turn glorifies Him. His word leads those who are willing to listen back into fellowship.

The reality of sin is complete separation of fellowship with God. Even though God is always present and maintains life in all of its goodness He is forced to separate Himself from personal fellowship when one’s holiness is lost due to sin. A servant is not pure as long as he is enslaved to sin. His lord is no longer God but sin and the god’s associated with the world. All servants’ have two spiritual choices available: either serve a god or God. There is no such thing as a non-servant. To believe otherwise is accepting a deception based upon human wisdom and is impossible to physically verify.

John quoted Jesus stating at least two important responses to the word of God and what takes place as a result of actively listening:

1) The Lord’s disciple must be willing to “abide in My word” (*John* 8:31b). He must be willing to live in it and by its counsel; which is a response requiring belief in the truth of His word, and a willingness to act upon what is believed. His actions verify and prove his belief. Faith in the word of God is a physical realization of expectations in the integrity of His word and must be verified and proven by the servant’s response to God’s will. What He promises to do will be done regardless of personal perceptions. Both belief and faith are in proportion to the servant’s willingness to allow the Spirit to lead him into a lifestyle which practices righteousness.

2) A servant’s response of love towards God is determined by his willingness to “keep My word.” If he agrees to love God according to His counsel, God the Father will honor this love response and “will love him” (*John* 14:23b). God’s grace of love is not unconditional. Jesus redefined love. God’s expectation of a love response is not based upon emotions. Even though it may involve emotions, it is not governed by emotions or the feelings of the heart and wisdom of the intellect.

True love towards God is expressed by a willingness to submit to God’s will as the servant relearns how to live life. This type of love expresses respect for who God is and recognizes Him as Lord. A servant’s love of God cannot be expressed until Jesus is

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honored in his life as Lord and Master. And he cannot honor Jesus as Lord until he understands how to do so according to His word. True love towards God is belief and faith motivated, and will result in obedience to His will. God's divine response also includes His promise to "make Our abode with him." In other words, the Holy Spirit will enter into him, and since the Spirit is one with Jesus and God the Father, the servant is one with God. He is a temple of God, "do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God" (I Corinthians 6:19a). When this takes place sin debt to God no longer exists, resulting in the servant's restored holiness and fellowship with God.

God's word is not just a collection of ancient writers who made up a great story. They wrote spiritual truth inspired by the Holy Spirit communicating the will of God. Without direct inspiration, no writer could ever imagine and write prophecies clever enough to prevent failure after hundreds of years have separated the writer from the fulfillment of the prophecy. No one is able to see into the future. The inspired writer's spoke of heavenly insights, mankind's origin, true purpose, and the Messiah, knowledge otherwise completely hidden. The word of God is ones gateway into His heart, and plan for the people He created.

Questions

Scripture is understandable by anyone.

John 8:51

- 1) Are you able to understand Scripture?
- 2) Do you know how to study Scripture?
- 3) Do you care about studying Scripture?
- 4) Why is it important to study Scripture?

Scripture has an unknown power.

Hebrews 4:12

- 1) What does Scripture do in you?
- 2) Are you able to sense its work in your being?

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Scripture is always effective.
Isaiah 55:10-11; Hebrews 4:12

- 1) Do you believe there is more to Scripture than a well written story?
- 2) If your heart disagrees with Scripture, which can you trust: your heart and feelings of rightness with God or Scripture?

Only Jesus knows what He is talking about.
1 Corinthians 2:4; Romans 10:17; Hebrews 11:1; 2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:1-2

- 1) Do you think Jesus is just one of many different sources of spiritual information?
- 2) Why only trust in Jesus?

What do you do if your feelings tell you not to trust in Jesus?
Jesus has the authority to judge one's response to His word.
Acts 3:22; Luke 12:4-5

- 1) Does knowing who will be your spiritual judge affect how you live life?
- 2) If Jesus is your judge how do you consider serving Him?
- 3) Is believing, confessing Him as Lord, faith, repentance, and obedience the same as worshipping Jesus as Master?

Scripture reveals unknown spiritual realities.
James 1:18a; 1 Timothy 4:6

- 1) A person may feel and even experience spiritual realities but are they understandable?
- 2) Is the heart able to understand unexplained spiritual realities or experiences?
- 3) Where do I go to find reliable spiritual information?

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Scripture is God's how-to handbook.

2 Peter 1:3-4; Proverbs 3:5; Genesis 8:21b; Proverbs 2:1, 5; Luke 11:28b; John 8:51; Exodus 15:1a, 11a, 12-13; Romans 15:4; Matthew 7:26-27

- 1) Is allowing your heart to lead personal worship the same as allowing Scripture to lead worship?
- 2) Are you able to understand how to serve God without very much Scriptural understanding? How much understanding do you need?
- 3) Should you depend solely upon other people to teach you how to live according to God's will?
- 4) Should you allow your feelings and heart to lead you through life in Christ?

Scripture reveals incomprehensible spiritual power.

1 Corinthians 1:18

- 1) Does Scripture affect your heart?
- 2) How does Scripture affect your life?
- 3) How does Scripture affect your faith?

The world cannot understand Scripture.

1 Corinthians 1:21a; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4; Acts 26:18a; Ephesians 2:2a; 1 Corinthians 1:22

- 1) Why would God only allow His servants to fully understand Scripture?
- 2) Should you rely upon people who are religious but have not obeyed the gospel for unquestioned Scriptural insight and guidance?
- 3) Should you allow your heart to lead you to sources of Scriptural information?

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Scripture demands a response.

Acts 17:28; Genesis 2:17a; John 5:25b; 2 Timothy 3:15; Acts 10:43; John 8:31b, 14:23b; 1 Corinthians 6:19a

- 1) When you read God's word what does it mean?
- 2) Do you believe serving God is an important part of worship?
- 3) Do sinners belong to God even though they are separated from Him?

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As Paul began to close his letter to the Galatians he tried to encourage his brethren to follow the Spirit's counsel in life, "And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith" (*Galatians* 6:9-10). Faith is realized in one's life through an obedient response to God's will. His will is the faith which Jesus established when the New Covenant took affect the moment He died.

A servant of sin must first develop faith in the word of God, which is a working confidence in His integrity. Faith will begin to grow as he reads and applies his belief in what God has spoken. The word of God reveals the Lord's New Covenant faith. Paul noted in his *first* letter to *Timothy*, "the faith that is in Christ Jesus," referring to what the Spirit inspired concerning the realities of Jesus, His sacrifice, and covenant (3:13b). He described the gospel message of Christ as the faith in which to develop faith.

The two types of faith are not the same, one is the faith--the New Covenant gospel of Jesus Christ, and the other is how a servant responds with faith to the source of the faith. In *Colossians* Paul helped to clarify the distinction while trying to encourage his brethren to "continue in the faith" (1:23a). He didn't speak about a nonspecific faith or religion but one exclusive faith established by Christ. He spoke of this one faith as "the hope of the gospel" (1:23b) which is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The faith is the gospel of Christ and this is what faith is placed in and practiced.

The New Covenant faith began with Jesus and developed with the birth and early growth of the church. In his *second* letter *Peter* noted the common bond of the faith among his brethren who, "have received a faith of the same kind as ours," highlighting the singular faith of the brotherhood in Christ (1:1). He continued to reveal, "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence" (1:3).

Jude mentioned the Lord's New Covenant faith in his letter when he stated "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints," highlighting a first century understanding of the consistency and completion of the faith (1:3). God did not communicate an evolving theology dependent upon periodic special revelations contemporary with cultural changes in order to remain up to date. God does not change Scripture because He feels an adjustment in theology is necessary. God does not change, nor does His communicated will, "For I, the Lord, do not change" (*Malachi* 3:6a).

All who have received the faith and share in "our common salvation" (1:3a) are known as God's "saints" (1:3b). These holy people of God have received righteousness by God as a result of demonstrated belief and faith which led them to obey the will of Jesus Christ. Luke recorded in *Acts*: "And the word of God kept on spreading; and the

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number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith" (6:7). Those of the faith are considered as children of God in "the household of the faith" (Galatians 6:10); which is the church of Jesus Christ, His very exclusive body of believers.

Questions

The faith is basically referring to the New Covenant gospel.

Galatians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 3:13b; Colossians 1:23; 2 Peter 1:1, 3; Jude 1:3; Malachi 3:6a; Acts 6:7; Galatians 6:10

- 1) How does the gospel affect your everyday life?
- 2) How important is the Lord's faith (Christianity), to you?
- 3) What is the Lord's faith?
- 4) What is the gospel?
- 5) What approach do you usually take when witnessing the Lord's faith:
 - a. You try to find fault in the other persons' faith in whatever faith he believes.
 - b. You build up his faith with Scriptures which picture the true faith of Christianity.

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People from all over the world try to preach many and diverse ways to satisfy the will of a singular generic god, God, even God the Father through Jesus Christ. Many others worship multiple gods, some type of idyllic after life existence, or a second chance with physical life. But they miss a vital spiritual fact which sets their beliefs apart from the one true God (God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit) and His true will. Scripture teaches only one way to approach God the Father in order to worship Him according to His will. It teaches one faith, only through Jesus Christ, and only according to His New Covenant, "I am the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (*John 14:6b*).

Scripture clearly reveals a singular way to restore fellowship with God. A servant is only able to exist in a state of holiness or purity when there is no sin debt to God. When a person is born, he is innocent of all accountability to sin and is automatically included within the family of God because he is innocent and holy. Sin is not inherited, only the nature to sin and the law of "good and evil", "the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself" (*Ezekiel 18:20b*).

However, once he matures to the point where he is able to understand the difference between "good and evil" he is free to choose how to react to his lust and any temptation caused by his desires. At this time in life he is mentally capable of choosing to sin and will choose to sin. Even the Lord exemplified how this works in the life of a young child. *Isaiah* prophesied of His birth, but added a few more details of His early childhood development, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign; behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows enough to refuse evil and choose good" (*7:14-15*).

Paul also described how the process works using his childhood as an example, "But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. And I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died" (*Romans 7:8-9*).

By saying "sin is dead" Paul did not mean sin didn't exist, but simply powerless during the time period between his birth and accountability to the Law. A Jewish child became accountable to the Law when his family, teachers, and village determined the time of his participation as a productive citizen. However, during the early years of his youth he learned the Law and a trade. Moses once said, "the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth" (*Genesis 8:21b*) indicating a beginning point when the knowledge of "good and evil" takes effect due to mental maturity.

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Jesus directly referred to the innocence and holiness of a child before the age of accountability when He said, "Permit the children to come to Me; and do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all" (*Mark 14b-15*). The following are three ways to inclusion in the Lord's kingdom:

1) His is born into it due to his basic innocence of life before accountability to any kind of law.

2) Once a person has transgressed against God he must receive forgiveness and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in order to re-enter His kingdom, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (*John 3:5b*). It is impossible for a young child to understand the concept of "good and evil" and how to respond to the Lord's gospel call.

3) His is "transferred" to the kingdom by God, "For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (*Colossians 1:13*).

Before accountability neither the Law nor the law of "good and evil" are able to condemn. A law from God must be transgressed in order for a transgression to take place. No transgression – no sin. His innocence and lack of accountability separated him from the death of sin. For him, during this time of childhood "sin is dead" or separated from his spiritual reality. Even though he inherited a basic nature to transgress the Law Paul did not inherit the accountability of another's debt of sin to God. But he could have inherited the ongoing physical affects of a family member's sin or even an ancestor going back further in his family line.

Once a mature child chooses to transgress against one law, regardless how insignificant, he has transgressed against God's will, immediately loses innocence, and becomes a slave of sin. Since he is no longer holy he is transferred out of the Lord's presence and kingdom to live in the spiritual realm of the world as a slave of sin under the dominion of Satan. Luke quoted Jesus identifying the "domain of darkness" as the "dominion of Satan" (*Acts 26:18a*).

When an innocent child becomes a servant there must be a master. There are only two spiritual masters: sin or to obedience and righteousness under the Lordship of Jesus. Paul helped to explain this spiritual reality in his letter to the *Romans*: "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness" (6:16). In (6:18) he said, "and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness". No one can serve both, it's not possible. In the spiritual realm dual citizenship does not exist.

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The only way a servant of sin is able to get rid of his debt to sin is through Jesus Christ. This is the reason why Jesus came to His creation, “for it is He who will save His people from their sins” (*Matthew 1:21b*). They will be “His people” because Jesus purchased their sins, “for you have been bought with a price” (*I Corinthians 6:20a*). What is the price—the cost of purchase? It is the life of Jesus, “the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (*Acts 20:28b*).

A servant is not one of His chosen because of genealogy, special responsibility to the Law, or position as God’s special people—the Jews. John the Baptist loudly proclaimed to the Jewish people, “Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (*John 1:29b*). The soon to come death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus gave Him the necessary payment to redeem those indebted to sin. The cost of redemption requires the sacrifice of an innocent life.

Soon after His ministry began Jesus clearly stated, “the world should be saved through Him” (*John 3:17b*). At the end of chapter three the writer explained a well established fact of first century faith in Christ, only those who are willing to place belief “in the Son has eternal life” (3:36a). All others are considered by God the Father of Jesus Christ as disobedient to His son and therefore will not receive life and restored fellowship with Himself, “but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life” (3:36b). John later quoted Jesus teaching about the exclusiveness of faith; He alone is “the resurrection and the life” (11:25a). There are no alternative ways to heaven.

A few years after the church began, the Spirit sent Peter to a Gentile named Cornelius. After he arrived he began to teach this God fearing man, his family, and friends the gospel. Fearing the One true God or worshipping Him could not release their debt of sin regardless of their piety towards God and good will to others. His worship and prayers however caught the attention of God. But He needed to send Peter to Cornelius in order to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ; “of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins” (*Acts 10:43*). After the Lord’s death the accustomed ways of worshipping within the stipulations of the Law of Moses and tradition had ended and Peter needed to teach them the New Covenant of Jesus. Paul once said, “how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent” (*Romans 10:14b-15a*).

Once a slave of sin is purchased he becomes a servant of God through Jesus Christ. This is a spiritual transaction referred to as redemption and is only available through Jesus Christ. Only Jesus has the satisfactory payment to end sin death—an innocent sinless death. Any other way to salvation is simply a deception to convince a slave of sin to believe he is saved, when in truth he is not.

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Earlier in *Acts*, Luke recorded Peter teaching the Jews about the major changes which took place after the Lord's death. Jesus replaced the covenant written by Moses with His New Covenant, outside of Jesus, God the Father is not able to save them from their sins. God the Father did not die in order to provide a redemption payment for their sins neither did the Holy Spirit. Only Jesus, God born in the flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit, accomplished this spiritual task in His very real human body. Peter boldly told his Jewish brethren: "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (*Acts* 4:12).

The words of God have final say in the matter of salvation. Every person has the freedom to choose who he is willing to serve. The choice is basically very simple, either to continue serving sin and Satan or receive freedom from sin and serve Jesus Christ.

Questions

There is only one way to God the Father.

John 6b; *Acts* 4:12

- 1) Does limiting access to God to only through Jesus seem a bit too restrictive?
- 2) As you live out your daily worship do you ever think about how important Jesus is, even in the most mundane activities?
- 3) Do you respect other faiths even though they do not lead their believers to heaven?
- 4) What do you think concerning the spiritual purpose of other faiths?
- 5) Do you think people are aware of the fact they may be worshipping in vain?

Everyone is accountable for only his sin and response to God's grace of redemption. *Ezekiel* 18:20b; *Isaiah* 7:14-15; *Romans* 7:8-9; *Genesis* 8:21b; *John* 3:5b; *Colossians* 1:13; *Acts* 26:18a; *Romans* 6:16, 18; *James* 1:12-15

- 1) Are people born with a sin debt to God?
- 2) Are people born innocent, free of all sin debt to God?

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- 3) If a child is innocent when do you think he first commits a transgression against God?
- 4) Do you believe all innocent children are God's holy children?
- 5) How do you feel about a child who sins and becomes unholy and is transferred to Satan's dominion?

Jesus came to provide a way to God the Father.

Matthew 1:21b; 1 Corinthians 6:20a; Acts 10:28b; John 1:29b, 3:17b, 3:36, 11:25a; Acts 10:43; Romans 10:14b-15a; Acts 4:12

- 1) How does knowing Jesus came to offer freedom from slavery to sin affect your life right now?
- 2) Do you think you would have approached God for salvation if Jesus did not first offer it to mankind?
- 3) Are people able to love God if they are not saved by Jesus?
- 4) Before you chose to return to God how did you satisfy your spiritual needs?

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When God communicated His grace of salvation through Jesus to mankind, He used at least four primary ways of assuring the integrity of His communication. Jesus enabled His apostles to understand the mystery of prophecy, to remember what He personally taught, and receive the knowledge necessary to learn and teach His New Covenant after His resurrection:

1) Jesus personally revealed the mystery of the gospel to His apostles. He did this through the work of the Holy Spirit, “when He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth ... He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you” (*John 16:14*). Later Paul received his ability to preach the gospel directly from Jesus, “the gospel which was preached to me is not according to man ... I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (*Galatians 1:11b, 12b*).

2) Jesus gave His apostles the ability to understand the prophets of old, “all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (*Luke 24:44b-45*); Scriptures written before the birth of Jesus.

3) He gave His apostles the ability to recall and remember what He taught, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (*John 14:26*).

4) “He will teach you all things,” also referred to the upcoming work of the Spirit to give inspiration to the apostles during their ministry. The apostles introduced the New Covenant word of God into world while the Spirit’s inspiration insured the divine origin and accuracy of what they taught and recorded for future use as Scripture. In his *second* letter to *Timothy* Paul revealed, “All Scripture is inspired by God” – Jesus Christ (*3:16a*).

The consistency of the gospel message is reflected throughout New Covenant Scriptures. In Paul’s *second* letter to the *Thessalonians*, he reminded his brethren, God “called you through our gospel” (*2:14*). In his letter to the *Romans*, Paul revealed the Lord’s strict use of only the gospel to lead mankind “to obedience of faith” (*16:26b*). After salvation the gospel is “able to establish” the saints in Christ (*16:25a*).

The person behind the gospel gives it its power, “it is the power of God for salvation” (*Romans 1:16a*). The gospel is basically the message of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, “that Christ died for our sins according to Scriptures, and that He was buried, and He was raised on the third day according to Scriptures” (*1 Corinthians 15:3b-4*). The gospel has the power to enter into the hard hearts of servants of sin and lead them to Jesus for redemption so “they may live in the Spirit according to the will of God” (*1 Peter 4:6b*).

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God gives eternal redemption only to those who are willing to appeal to Jesus through the gospel message for redemption. Jesus promises they will become “fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ through the gospel” (*Ephesians 3:6b*).

Questions

The gospel is a vital message to everyone.

John 16:14; Galatians 1:11b, 12b; Luke 24:44b-45, John 14:26; 2 Timothy 3:16a; 2 Thessalonians 2:14;

- 1) What is the gospel?
- 2) Why is it so important?
- 3) Is the gospel important in your life today?

The gospel is how servants of sin are called to God.

2 Thessalonians 2:14 Romans 16:26b, 16:25a, 1:16a

- 1) Is the gospel a very restrictive way of receiving salvation?
- 2) How does the gospel save anyone?

The gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

1 Corinthians 15:3b-4

- 1) The gospel is divine knowledge about Jesus, but is knowledge alone enough to save?

The gospel is the power of God.

Romans 1:16; 1 Peter 4:6; Ephesians 3:6b

- 1) The gospel is like the most explosive power ever created, but how?
- 2) Is the gospel powerful in your life?

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Section Two: God Speaks To His People

Questions

The Gospel

- 3) Why does the gospel have power in your life?
- 4) How does the gospel radiate spiritual energy in your life?

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Section Two: God Speaks To His People

The Lord's call

God calls all peoples worldwide, regardless of their sin debt to God, through the gospel message of Jesus Christ. In *First Corinthians* Paul noted: "God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1:9). God never leaves a person out because He has predetermined his eternal destination. God knows everyone's eternal destiny, but it's not because of His determination. God has chosen His people "from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth" (2 *Thessalonians* 2:13b). God predetermined from before creation the Lord's entrance into His creation at just the right time to offer His body as a sacrifice in order to secure the cost of redeeming sin debt, once for all time. Only the life of an innocent sinless man would meet the demands of sin debt redemption. His people are those who have freely chosen to appeal to God through Jesus, "and it was for this He called you through our gospel" (2 *Thessalonians* 2:14a). New Covenant saints are predetermined because of the predetermination of Jesus.

Every servant of sin is offered the same uncoerced opportunity to accept or reject God's grace of salvation offered through the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, only those who are willing to respond to the gospel with belief, faith, and obedience to the will of the Lord Jesus are allowed to enter into His covenant. The servant must agree to the conditions of the covenant before he is able to enter into the covenant. The called of God are only those redeemed by Jesus according to the will of God the Father through a singular response of belief and faith which results in an obedient appeal to Jesus Christ for redemption.

Once a person hears the gospel he must make a choice. He can respond according to the will of God, reject it, substitute it for another faith or religion, or just not care one way or the other. The one thing impossible to do however is to retire the debt of sin by one's own efforts regardless of how good and loving his works may appear. Sin debt is a spiritual debt and requires a spiritual payment--death. The only thing sin owes its laborer is death, "for the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a). This is why the gospel, even though one must respond physically, is a blessing "by the grace of Christ," because He alone is able to satisfy the payment of any sin debt to God (*Galatians* 1:6b). And He does so without cost, "but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23b). The slave of sin is not able to pay for his freedom. It's impossible.

The purpose of the Lord's call is redemption, any servant of sin may become His servant, but he must be willing, "to follow in His steps" (1 *Peter*)

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2:21b). Redemption fulfills the prophetic words of Moses quoted by Peter, "you shall be holy, for I am holy," an unrighteous slave of sin must be made holy by Jesus and remain pure from sin in Him (*1 Peter* 1:16b). And there is only one way for this to happen, through the Lord's gospel call found only in the inspired word of God.

Questions

The Lord call is freely offered to everyone.

John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 1:9

- 1) Do you feel too sinful to receive the Lord's call?
- 2) Is the Lord personally calling you?
- 3) How is the Lord calling you?
- 4) Do you think the Lord continues to call you even after your conversion?

God does not exclude any person because of predetermined spiritual status.

2 Thessalonians 2:13b, 2:14a; John 3:16

- 1) Do you believe some people will never accept God's offer of salvation because it is their destiny to die in sin?
- 2) Likewise, do you believe some people will not have any other choice than to accept the Lord's call?
- 3) Is Jesus calling out to anyone with any sin to accept His gospel?
- 4) How do you feel about your destiny?

The Lord's call demands a choice.

Romans 6:32a; Galatians 1:6b; Romans 6:23b; 1 Peter 2:21b; 1 Peter 1:16b

- 1) If you heard the gospel would you feel more accountable to God?

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Questions

The Lord's call

- 2) Is the gospel call offering a choice between accepting sin or righteousness?
- 3) How would you feel if someone told you about the gospel?
- 4) How did you consider the gospel the first time you heard it preached or shared?