

WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE BY FAITH

***A STUDY THAT SEEKS TO CULTIVATE AN INCREASING FAITH
IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER***

MARTIN PURYEAR

WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE BY FAITH

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THIS IS THE CONFIDENCE WHICH WE HAVE BEFORE HIM, THAT, IF WE ASK ANYTHING ACCORDING TO HIS WILL, HE HEARS US. AND IF WE KNOW THAT HE HEARS US IN WHATEVER WE ASK, WE KNOW THAT WE HAVE THE REQUESTS WHICH WE HAVE ASKED FROM HIM.

– 1ST JOHN 5:14-15

WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE BY FAITH**A SNAPSHOT OF THE COURSE***Our Objective*

To cultivate an increasing faith in the life of the believer

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HAS GOD EVER SAID “NO” TO YOU?

AND THE LORD SAID, “IF YOU HAD FAITH LIKE A MUSTARD SEED, YOU WOULD SAY TO THIS MULBERRY TREE, ‘BE UPROOTED AND BE PLANTED IN THE SEA’; AND IT WOULD OBEY YOU.” (LUKE 17:6)

Have you ever prayed for something ... *ferently* ... *for a long time* ... and *asked others to pray with you* ... especially those you knew to be “prayer warriors” ... and God said, “No”? Have you ever tried to pray your way through a “door” ... and God shut it?

I have. Claiming verses like Luke 17:6, I told myself, “Nothing is impossible for God.” So, I said to my “mulberry tree,” “Be uprooted and be planted in the sea.” But it did not move an inch. The One Who so easily could have said “Yes, I will move this tree” ... the all-powerful One Who made heaven and earth ... He said, “No, I will not move this tree.”

He did not say, “No, not yet.” He said, “No, not ever.” And when He did, it *felt* like “**NO!**” For two long years I had asked almighty God to do something. And when it finally dawned on me that His answer had come but was not the answer I wanted, it did not feel like a door being gently closed in front of me. No, it *felt* more like a slam-lock. He *slam-locked* the door I was trying to go through; and it smashed my nose and crushed my toes. His answer hurt; and what made matters worse was that I did not see it coming. I was fully expecting a “Yes” ... but that is not what I got. And while others counseled me as to what my Plan B should be, I was still reeling, trying to figure out why God had not given me Plan A.

At first, I was stunned ... then angry ... then embittered ... then empty and disillusioned toward the very One Who – in His magnanimous love – sent His beloved Son *to die for me!* At the time I was not quite three years old in the Lord, and I had no idea what was going on. My heavenly Father (seemed to have) let me down. He (seemed to have) reneged on His promise in Luke 17:6. After all, my faith was at least the size of a mustard seed. And if not mine, certainly the faith of all my prayer warrior friends was. I felt abandoned and confused. All my other friends ... well, their lives were progressing quite nicely, the way they wanted them to. But my life? It was going nowhere. On one occasion, when others around me were praying, I did not even bow my head. What good was that going to do!

It took me two full years to recover from that “No.” It took even longer for me to understand why a believer, having faith the size of “a mustard seed,” can say to a “mulberry tree,” “Be uprooted and be planted in the sea” ... but nothing happens. Why? Why was my request withheld from me? What was I missing? ¹

Has God ever said “No” to you? If so, did that leave you feeling confused? Or even worse, stunned ... then angry ... then embittered ... then empty and disillusioned? Have you ever felt like God has let you down? How can a *believer believe* that “God answers prayer” when – at times – his requests are (seemingly) ignored or outright denied? How does a person “live by

faith” in One Whose answers seem so “haphazard” (sometimes “Yes,” sometimes “No”)? Is there any rhyme or reason to the way He answers prayer? Have you ever struggled with the question, “If God is going to do what *He* wants to do, then why should I even bother to pray” ²

And yet, that *is* what our Lord expects of us. He expects us to come to Him in prayer, believing.

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)

Beloved friends, the life that pleases God is a life lived by faith. Yet, this may be the very issue over which you are struggling right now. Or perhaps you simply have some questions. If so, maybe this course can help.

¹ This question will be answered later in our study.

² This question will also be answered later in our study.

THE ELEMENTS OF FAITH

AS IT IS WRITTEN, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

(ROMANS 1:17)

MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM.

(HEBREWS 10:38)

Our heavenly Father expects us to "live by faith." But how does one do that? To address this important question, we should first get our bearings. What are the essential *elements* of faith?

There are three.

First, faith always has an *object*.

The object of your faith is the person or thing you are *trusting*.

Second, faith always has *content*.

The content of your faith is what you are trusting the object of your faith *to do*.

And third, faith always has an *amount*.

The amount of your faith is the *level of trust* you have in the object of your faith.

An Illustration

Perhaps you are sitting down right now. You are probably not aware of this, but every time you sit down, you exercise faith.

You are *depending on* something.

You are *trusting* something.

You *have confidence in* it.

You are *relying upon* it.

You believe *in* it.

In this illustration the "something" you are *trusting* is, of course, the chair. The chair is the **object** of your faith.

Furthermore, when you sat down on the chair, you *believed* it would hold up your weight. That, of course, is what all chairs "promise" to do ... to support an individual's full weight. When you committed your weight to the chair, you were depending on it *to keep that promise*. Its promise to hold up your weight was the **content** of your faith. This is what you trusted the chair to *do*.

But suppose the chair did not look all that sturdy. To be honest, your confidence in the chair was not great. You wondered if it would be able to hold up your weight. Nevertheless, you gradually eeeeeased your weight down upon it. And to your relief, it held you up. This small **amount** of faith was all it took for you to benefit from what the chair promised to do.

These are the three elements of faith:

Faith always has an *object*.

Faith always has *content*.

And faith always has an *amount*.

Let's now apply these three *elements* of faith to the Christian life.

The Object of Faith

BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO TRUSTS IN THE LORD AND WHOSE TRUST IS THE LORD.

(JEREMIAH 17:7)

IN GOD, WHOSE WORD I PRAISE, IN GOD I HAVE PUT MY TRUST; I SHALL NOT BE AFRAID.

(PSALMS 56:4)

NOW WHEN JESUS HEARD ABOUT JOHN, HE WITHDREW FROM THERE IN A BOAT TO A SECLUDED PLACE BY HIMSELF; AND WHEN THE PEOPLE HEARD OF THIS, THEY FOLLOWED HIM ON FOOT FROM THE CITIES. WHEN HE WENT ASHORE, HE SAW A LARGE CROWD, AND FELT COMPASSION FOR THEM AND HEALED THEIR SICK. WHEN IT WAS EVENING, THE DISCIPLES CAME TO HIM AND SAID, "THIS PLACE IS DESOLATE AND THE HOUR IS ALREADY LATE; SO SEND THE CROWDS AWAY, THAT THEY MAY GO INTO THE VILLAGES AND BUY FOOD FOR THEMSELVES." BUT JESUS SAID TO THEM, "THEY DO NOT NEED TO GO AWAY; YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT!" THEY SAID TO HIM, "WE HAVE HERE ONLY FIVE LOAVES AND TWO FISH." AND HE SAID, "BRING THEM HERE TO ME." ORDERING THE PEOPLE TO SIT DOWN ON THE GRASS, HE TOOK THE FIVE LOAVES AND THE TWO FISH, AND LOOKING UP TOWARD HEAVEN, HE BLESSED THE FOOD, AND BREAKING THE LOAVES HE GAVE THEM TO THE DISCIPLES, AND THE DISCIPLES GAVE THEM TO THE CROWDS, AND THEY ALL ATE AND WERE SATISFIED. THEY PICKED UP WHAT WAS LEFT OVER OF THE BROKEN PIECES, TWELVE FULL BASKETS. THERE WERE ABOUT FIVE THOUSAND MEN WHO ATE, BESIDES WOMEN AND CHILDREN. (MATTHEW 14:13-21)

Of all the recorded miracles performed by Jesus, this one – “the feeding of the 5,000” – is the only one mentioned in all four Gospels.³ Apparently, this event offers a priceless lesson, one that God does not want His people to miss.

We should first take note that the number 5,000 was the number of *adult males*⁴ in the crowd, “besides women and children.” In other words, this crowd was much larger than 5,000 individuals. When we add a reasonable estimate for the women present (perhaps another 2,500+) and a reasonable estimate for the children present (another 2,500+), the population of this crowd swells considerably. It would, therefore, be more accurate to describe what happened that day as “the feeding of the 10,000 plus.” This was the number of people that would have to share a little boy’s meal of “five barley loaves and two fish” (John 6:9). So, the first detail we should not miss is the *impossibility* of Jesus’ command: “You give them something to eat.”

Second, we should take note of the disciples’ *response* to Jesus’ command. In Luke 9:11 we read that our Lord spent *that very day* “curing those who had need of healing” (another important detail). Throughout the day, these twelve men watched their Master meet the

³ Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14

⁴ The Greek word used here is *aner* [pronounced ah **nair**] referring to “a man,” “an individual male.”

physical needs of the people by performing one miracle after another. Yet, when Jesus challenged them to perform this impossible feat, “*You* give them something to eat,” they did not turn to the miracle-Worker for help. Instead, they resorted to using their own efforts to meet this need. They went out among the crowd in search of food ... to feed 10,000+ people!

After making their sweep through the crowd, the disciples reported back to Jesus: “What You expect of us is not possible. We only found five barley loaves and two fish.” In other words, they said to Him

WE CAN’T.

Have you ever wondered how Jesus *wanted* these twelve men to respond to His command? Did He really expect them to say, “*Sure, we can do that*”? The Apostle John tells us in his account that this was, in fact, a *test*, “for He Himself knew what He was intending to do” (John 6:6). Jesus was already planning to feed this large crowd. But in the process, He also wanted to teach His followers how to respond in faith to “the impossible will of God,” commands that He, as Head of the Church, would expect them to obey after His departure from them.

When they admitted they did not have the ability to obey Jesus’ command, they were right. They did not. So, they passed the first half of the test with this honest confession. But they failed the second half of the test. They ignored the *ability* of their ever-present, all-powerful God to do the impossible. The fact is

MAN IS UNABLE TO DO THE WILL OF GOD APART FROM THE POWER OF GOD.

Perhaps, that is what Jesus was waiting for them to admit.

WE CAN’T ... BUT *YOU* CAN.

Jesus wanted these men to acknowledge their inability to do what only *God* can do. He knew that, as His ambassadors, they would need that understanding for the rest of their lives. They would need to be fully convinced that

ONLY GOD HAS THE POWER TO OBEY GOD.

So, why was this miracle recorded in all four Gospels? Perhaps to emphasize – through repetition – that same point to all His followers throughout the Church Age. As representatives of Christ, we, too, need to be fully convinced that God, and God alone, has the power to live as Christ lived, to speak as Christ spoke, and to serve as Christ served. It is a truth of which we need to remind ourselves, not just once in our lives but repeatedly.

WE CANNOT DO THE LORD’S WILL IN OUR OWN STRENGTH ...
BUT THE SPIRIT OF GOD WHO LIVES WITHIN US CAN.

Consider, for example, God's command for His children to "love ⁵ your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Or His command for us to be "forgiving (of) each other, *just as* ⁶ God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). Can you do all that? Can you love and forgive those who *repeatedly* wrong you *to the same degree* that God has loved you and forgiven you of *all* your sins: past, present, and future? I can't. These two commands (indeed, all God's commands) are impossible for us to obey ... perfectly ... in our own strength ... every minute of our lives. The Lord might as well command *us* to feed over 10,000 people with five loaves and two fish. Beloved,

ONLY GOD HAS THE POWER TO OBEY GOD ...

... which brings us back to the first element of faith. We said that faith always has an **object**. The object of our faith is "*the person or thing we are trusting.*"

Returning to our "chair" illustration, we noted that whenever one sits on a chair, he is depending on the chair to do something. The *chair* is the object of his faith.

In the Christian life the Object of our faith is a Person. The Person we are to depend on is God.

GOD IS THE OBJECT OF OUR FAITH.
HE IS THE PERSON WE ARE TRUSTING.

Now, that might seem obvious; but the fact is, we who believe in the perfect wisdom and power of God have a surprising tendency to place our faith in something other than God. Indeed, the Christian community has several *false objects of faith*. This can be so subtle that many do not realize they are doing so. The reason we do not always catch ourselves making this mistake is because what we put our faith in seems so "spiritual."

False Objects of Faith

- * For example, let's say that a local church is experiencing a steady decline in its membership. So, they call a high-profile preacher to serve as their new pastor. This man has written three best-seller books on church growth and is a popular Bible teacher. The congregation is excited over the prospect of his ministry.

⁵ "Love your enemies" – Greek, agapao. This is the same (supreme) quality of love described in 1st Corinthians, chapter 13.

⁶ "Just as God ... has forgiven you" – Greek, kathos. "Even as" (i.e., with the **same quality** and to the **same degree** as God's forgiveness)

“SURELY, OUR CHURCH WILL GROW UNDER THIS MAN’S LEADERSHIP.”

Without realizing it, the members are putting their faith in *a gifted individual*. Maybe that church will grow; maybe not. But one thing is certain: Jesus Christ said, “I will build My Church” (Matthew 16:18); He did not say, “Gifted preachers with charisma will build My Church.”

To be sure, the Lord wants us to *use* gifted individuals to strengthen His Church. He has given them to us for that purpose (Ephesians 4:11-16). But He does not want us to *rely upon* them. God is to be the only Object of our faith. He expects us to *rely upon Him*. (He wants us to *ferently pray* for these gifted individuals!)

This truth also applies to *our own* God-given abilities and opportunities: our intellect, our education, our expertise, our experience. Are we to *use* our gifts? Absolutely! As faithful stewards, let us give our Master every ounce of skill we have ... with perseverance! But to *trust in* those gifts, no. As we give him our best, we still need to **pray** ... *ferently* ... for God’s wisdom, guidance, and power.

- * Or perhaps you have heard someone say this: “Our church would grow if we built a multi-purpose facility” or “if we had a dynamic youth program” or “if we moved to a better location” or “if we increased the size of our parking lot.” These believers have good intentions; but they are placing their faith in the wrong objects. They are trusting *in materials, in programs, and in strategies* to “build the church.”

Did “all Judea and all the district around the Jordan” hunger after the message of John the Baptizer because “the wilderness” was an excellent location?

Were “about three thousand souls” added to the infant church in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost because they had a dynamic youth leader or because of their building program? (Please read Acts 1:4-5, 12-14.)

The Lord Jesus, of course, wants us to *use* the resources He gives us to advance His Church. But He does not want us to *depend upon* these resources to bring forth fruit. God is to be the sole Object of our faith (something we should *acknowledge* in our **prayers** ... *often*).

- * Probably, the most common mistake we make is to place our faith in *the strength of our faith*.

“Out of this entire church, surely there is at least one prayer warrior whose faith is strong enough to believe I will get that job I applied for.” Having this mindset, the greatness of a prayer warrior’s faith is the object of one’s trust.

Yes, the Lord *does* want our faith to be strong and fervent. But the depth of our faith is not what we are to trust. We are *not* to put our faith in faith. We are to put our faith in God. He is to be the one and only Object of our faith.

Most certainly, we should *use* the gifted individuals and materials Christ has given us. We should *apply* our own God-given abilities and opportunities. We should *follow* Biblical strategies. And we, as His sons and daughters, should be strong in faith. We should do *all* this. But we should place our trust in none of it. Instead, we should practice the claim found on coins minted in the United States:

“IN **GOD** WE TRUST”

Therefore,

LET US GIVE TO GOD OUR VERY BEST.

(AFTER ALL, THE LABOR OF A FAITHFUL STEWARD SHOULD BE OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY)

BUT LET US **PRAY** AS IF EVERYTHING DEPENDS UPON HIM.

(BECAUSE IT DOES)

GOD, AND GOD ALONE, IS TO BE THE OBJECT OF OUR FAITH.

MY SOUL, WAIT IN SILENCE FOR GOD ONLY, FOR MY HOPE IS FROM HIM. HE ONLY IS MY ROCK AND MY SALVATION, MY STRONGHOLD; I SHALL NOT BE SHAKEN. ON GOD MY SALVATION AND MY GLORY REST; THE ROCK OF MY STRENGTH, MY REFUGE IS IN GOD. TRUST IN HIM AT ALL TIMES, O PEOPLE; POUR OUT YOUR HEART BEFORE HIM; GOD IS A REFUGE FOR US. (PSALMS 62:5-8)

The Content of Faith

*I DELIGHT TO DO YOUR WILL, O MY GOD; YOUR LAW IS WITHIN MY HEART.
(PSALM 40:8)*

NOW ON ONE OF THOSE DAYS JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES GOT INTO A BOAT, AND HE SAID TO THEM, "LET US GO OVER TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LAKE." SO THEY LAUNCHED OUT. BUT AS THEY WERE SAILING ALONG HE FELL ASLEEP; AND A FIERCE GALE OF WIND DESCENDED ON THE LAKE, AND THEY BEGAN TO BE SWAMPED AND TO BE IN DANGER. THEY CAME TO JESUS AND WOKE HIM UP, SAYING, "MASTER, MASTER, WE ARE PERISHING!" AND HE GOT UP AND REBUKED THE WIND AND THE SURGING WAVES, AND THEY STOPPED, AND IT BECAME CALM. AND HE SAID TO THEM, "WHERE IS YOUR FAITH?" THEY WERE FEARFUL AND AMAZED, SAYING TO ONE ANOTHER, "WHO THEN IS THIS, THAT HE COMMANDS EVEN THE WINDS AND THE WATER, AND THEY OBEY HIM?" (LUKE 8:22-25; SEE ALSO MATTHEW 8:18, 23-27 AND MARK 4:35-41)

Have you ever read the above account from the Gospels and thought that Jesus was being a bit “hard” on His disciples? After all, these men were not new at being on the water. Several of them were seasoned fishermen who had experienced plenty of rough water while at work in their trade. So, when their boat “began to be swamped,” and they responded to the situation with, “Master, Master, we are perishing,” we can be sure that their frantic cry for help was not an overreaction. This “fierce gale of wind” truly put them “in danger.”

But notice the Savior’s response to their plea. Being awakened from His sleep to see waves breaking over into the boat, Jesus did not say, “Hmm ... yes, I see what you mean!” Instead, He marveled at the *unnecessary* fear He saw on their faces. “Why are you afraid?” (Matthew 8; Mark 4)

“Why are we afraid! We are about to sink!”

Surely, their fear was an *appropriate* response to danger! Should they not be taking steps to protect themselves? Why was their fear so unreasonable? And if that were not enough, their Master’s gentle correction continued with a stinging rebuke. “Where is your faith?” In Matthew 8, He is recorded as saying, “Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?” And in Mark 4, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

Where is your faith! Men of *little* faith! You still have **no** faith! “Lord, what exactly are we supposed to be believing ... but are failing to do so!”

Although there may be more than one answer to this question,⁷ one is easily overlooked. When “Jesus and His disciples got into a boat,” He did not say to them, “Let us go to the middle of the lake

⁷ By His teachings and His character, did they not yet know that He was an extraordinary Man? Furthermore, because they had seen Him perform multiple miracles, should they not have by now at least come to the same conclusion as had Nicodemus, “We know that You have come from God ... for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (John 3:2)?

and sink.” *The will of this “miracle-Worker” had been clearly revealed to them: “Let us go over to the other side of the lake.”*

This brings us to the second element of faith. Not only does faith always have an object, faith also always has **content**. The content of our faith is *what we are trusting the object of our faith to do*.

Returning to our chair illustration, whenever one sits down, he depends on the chair to *do something* ... namely, to do what all chairs promise to do: to hold up his weight. “I am trusting this chair (the object of my faith) to hold up my weight (the **content** of my faith).”

Likewise, those who live by faith are trusting God to remain true to *His* promises.

- 1) We are trusting Him to **be** what He promised to **be**: “I promise to be true to My unchanging character.”

FOR I, THE LORD, DO NOT CHANGE (MALACHI 3:6)

EVERY GOOD THING GIVEN AND EVERY PERFECT GIFT IS FROM ABOVE, COMING DOWN FROM THE FATHER OF LIGHTS, WITH WHOM THERE IS NO VARIATION OR SHIFTING SHADOW. (JAMES 1:17)

THE **UNCHANGING CHARACTER OF GOD** IS THE CONTENT OF OUR FAITH.

THIS IS WHAT WE ARE TRUSTING HIM TO **BE**.

- 2) We also are trusting God to **do** what He promised to **do**: “I promise to do my perfect will.”

THIS IS THE CONFIDENCE WHICH WE HAVE BEFORE HIM, THAT, IF WE ASK ANYTHING ACCORDING TO HIS WILL, HE HEARS US. AND IF WE KNOW THAT HE HEARS US IN WHATEVER WE ASK, WE KNOW THAT WE HAVE THE REQUESTS WHICH WE HAVE ASKED FROM HIM. (1ST JOHN 5:14-15)

THE **PERFECT WILL OF GOD** IS THE CONTENT OF OUR FAITH.

THIS IS WHAT WE ARE TRUSTING HIM TO **DO**.

But here again, a large number in the Church have not fully grasped this simple truth.

Right Object. Wrong Content.

Many sincere believers, desiring to live by faith, make the mistake of trusting God to do *their* will, not His will. They trust Him to do – not what *He promised* to do but – what *they want Him to do*. In doing so, they set themselves up for what may turn out to be a major disappointment.

Brothers and sisters, God alone has a “bird’s eye view” of our lives. We do not. Our view is limited. As a result, the direction in which we want to go ... and the direction in which God takes us ... are not always the same. When this happens, we should remind ourselves that His way is always wiser, and His timing is always better, than our own. Always.

“... MY THOUGHTS ARE NOT YOUR THOUGHTS, NOR ARE YOUR WAYS MY WAYS,” DECLARES THE LORD. FOR AS THE HEAVENS ARE HIGHER THAN THE EARTH, SO ARE MY WAYS HIGHER THAN YOUR WAYS AND MY THOUGHTS THAN YOUR THOUGHTS.” (ISAIAH 55:8-9)

Nevertheless, there are those who continue to *equate* their desires to be God’s desires, their logic to be God’s logic, their methods to be God’s methods, or their timing to be God’s timing. So, that is what they trust Him to do ... what *they* think is best. Rather than “standing on the promises of God,” they are standing on the presumptions of their heart. “Surely, the all-wise One thinks the same way I do on this matter since my way makes so much sense!”

Their faith is in the right Object; but their faith has the wrong content. Living by faith does not mean trusting God to do what we think is best (and He should think so, too). Nor does it mean trusting God to give us *what* we want, *when* we want it (and He should want us to have that same thing, too ... right now).

*LIVING BY FAITH IS TRUSTING GOD TO DO **HIS WILL** ... IN **HIS TIME**.*

This is the attitude found within a mature *prayer warrior*. One who is seasoned in prayer will present his requests placed upon an opened palm (“*Your* will be done”) rather than held within a clenched fist (“*My* will be done”). To be sure, the Father has the power to give us, His children, what we would like to have. And He often does. But He also has the wisdom to withhold from us the requests that fall short of His perfect love.

That is (in part) what living by faith looks like. It is a commitment to do God’s will instead of our own if the two differ. If they are different, *His will is always better*. (I do not say it is always easier or more convenient.) And is that not what we want for our lives, what is best?

So, Has God Ever Said “No” to You?

AND THE LORD SAID, “IF YOU HAD FAITH LIKE A MUSTARD SEED, YOU WOULD SAY TO THIS MULBERRY TREE, ‘BE UPROOTED AND BE PLANTED IN THE SEA’; AND IT WOULD OBEY YOU.” (LUKE 17:6)

Have you ever prayed for something ... fervently ... for a long time ... and asked others to pray with you ... especially those you knew to be “prayer warriors” ... and God said, “No”?

I have. Claiming verses like Luke 17:6, I told myself, “Nothing is impossible for God.” So, I said to my “mulberry tree,” “Be uprooted and be planted in the sea.” (“Almighty Father, please give me what I want.”) But it did not move an inch. The One Who so easily could have said “Yes, I will

move this tree” ... the all-powerful One Who made heaven and earth ... He said, “No, I will not move this tree.” (“Beloved child, I will not give you what you want.”)

I was stunned! After all, my faith was at least the size of a mustard seed! And if not mine, certainly the faith of all my prayer warrior friends was. I felt abandoned and confused. Why did God withhold His “Yes” from me? What was I missing?

I was missing the *context* of Luke 17:6.

We find the promise of verse 6 at the end of three commands found in verses 3 and 4:

BE ON YOUR GUARD! (1) IF YOUR BROTHER SINS, REBUKE HIM; (2) AND IF HE REPENTS, FORGIVE HIM. (3) AND IF HE SINS AGAINST YOU SEVEN TIMES A DAY, AND RETURNS TO YOU SEVEN TIMES, SAYING, 'I REPENT,' FORGIVE HIM." (LUKE 17:3-4)

Notice the subject matter of this passage (Luke 17:3b-6). It concerns a believer's response toward a fellow believer who sins against him – even repeatedly – yet, in sincerity, asks for forgiveness each time. Christ commands us to “forgive him.” That is, we are to forgive our brothers and sisters with the same *kind* of forgiveness – and to the same *degree* – that God has forgiven us. (In Matthew 18:21-22, Jesus commands us to forgive our antagonists, not just seven times but “seventy times seven” times!)

This, of course, is impossible to do in our own strength because it grates *against* everything our sin nature wants to do: bite back ... humiliate ... slander ... get even ... hold a grudge ... hate (Romans 7:15-23). It would take nothing short of a miracle to obey this command, a fact our disciple-Maker does not want us to miss!

Most certainly, the disciples got the message. That is why their immediate response to verses 3 and 4 was verse 5: “Increase our faith!” They knew that God's expectation of them was beyond their reach. The bar was too high. To obey the Lord demanded a power they did not have.

ONLY GOD HAS THE POWER TO OBEY GOD

Luke 17:6 is a promise to believers who face the challenge of obeying the moral will of God (in this case, repeated forgiveness of one's antagonist), commandments beyond the reach of man's ability.

- “If you trust Me to give you *My* miraculous *power* (*'IF YOU HAD FAITH'*)
- so that you can perform *My* impossible *will* (*'MULBERRY TREE, BE UPROOTED AND BE PLANTED IN THE SEA'*),
- even though your faith may be exceedingly small (*'LIKE A MUSTARD SEED'*),
- I promise to empower you to do *My* will (*'IT WOULD OBEY YOU'*).”

... which brings us back to the lesson *my* disciple-Maker was teaching *me*. Most certainly, there was nothing inappropriate about my prayers. As directed by the Scriptures, I was simply “letting my requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6), something we are all encouraged

to do. My plea, however, was not for the power to obey His moral will. It was a plea for God to give me something I wanted ... *something He had never actually promised to give me.*

THE **CONTENT** OF MY FAITH WAS WRONG.

IGNORING THE *CONTEXT*,
(GOD'S PROMISE TO GIVE ME **HIS POWER TO OBEY HIS MORAL WILL**)

I WAS EXPECTING GOD TO GIVE ME **A CAREER I WANTED** ... BUT HAD NOT BEEN PROMISED.
(HE HAD A BETTER CAREER FOR ME)

Beloved, it is possible to pray often. It is possible to pray fervently. And it is possible to get the whole church to pray with us. But unless we are praying according to *the will of the Father*, His answer will be "No." God loves us too much to do otherwise. He wants our best. If we ask Him for a loaf of bread, He will say "Yes." But if we ask Him for a stone, He will say "No." ⁸

For God to answer our prayers "Yes," they must be in alignment with His character and will.

THE UNCHANGING CHARACTER OF GOD IS THE CONTENT OF OUR FAITH.
THIS IS WHAT GOD PROMISES TO **BE**.

THE PERFECT WILL OF GOD IS THE CONTENT OF OUR FAITH.
THIS IS WHAT GOD PROMISES TO **DO**.

⁸ This answers the question, "Why was my request withheld from me? What was I missing?" ("Has God Ever Said 'No' to You," page 6)

But what about these passages! Do they not allow me to *expect* God to do what I want Him to do?

IF YOU ASK ME ANYTHING IN MY NAME, I WILL DO IT. (JOHN 14:14)

IF YOU ABIDE IN ME AND MY WORDS ABIDE IN YOU, ASK WHATEVER YOU WISH, AND IT SHALL BE DONE FOR YOU. (JOHN 15:7)

"Anything." "Whatever you wish." These verses seem to indicate that we can trust the Lord to do anything *we want Him to do*. But we should look more carefully at the wording. These verses are not an exhortation for us to "name it, claim it, and we will get it." The word "*if*" at the beginning of these two verses attaches certain conditions that must be met for the promise to be kept.

John 14:14 does not say,

ASK ME ANYTHING, AND I WILL DO IT.

It says,

IF YOU ASK ME ANYTHING IN MY NAME, I WILL DO IT. (JOHN 14:14)

When we close our prayers “in Jesus’ Name,” we are not saying “Abracadabra” as if His holy and reverent Name were a magic formula or charm. “To ask in Jesus’ ‘Name’ ... means the believer’s prayer should be (1) for *Christ’s purposes and kingdom* and not for selfish reasons; (2) based on *Christ’s merits* and not any personal merit of worthiness; and (3) in pursuit of *Christ’s glory* alone.” (*The MacArthur Study Bible*, MacArthur, John, footnote: The Gospel of John 14:13-14, page 2212).

Therefore, the *attitude* of prayer made “in Jesus’ Name” is to be

- Christ-centered (not self-centered)
- submissive to the will of the Father (not self-willed).
- in pursuit of God’s glory (not the glory of self)
- all being motivated by the Holy Spirit (not by the flesh)

If this is the attitude behind our requests, then God “will do it.”

Furthermore, the other verse, *John 15:7*, does not say:

ASK WHATEVER YOU WISH, AND IT SHALL BE DONE FOR YOU.

It says,

IF YOU ABIDE IN ME AND MY WORDS ABIDE IN YOU, ASK WHATEVER YOU WISH, AND IT SHALL BE DONE FOR YOU.
(*JOHN 15:7*)

Because of his devotion to the *Living* Word of God (Jesus Christ), a mature believer’s mind and heart will be richly saturated with the *written* Word of God (the Scriptures). As he remains in (abides in) this intimate fellowship with Christ through His Word, he will want to do things God’s way. He will strive to obey His commands, and he will *pray according to His will*. (His prayers will reflect the interests of the One he seeks to please.) As a result, he can *expect* God to give him *whatever he wishes*. Why? Because whatever he wishes conforms to *the wishes of God*.

1st *John 5:14-15* provides us with an even clearer passage:

AND IF WE KNOW THAT HE HEARS US IN WHATEVER WE ASK, WE KNOW THAT WE HAVE THE REQUESTS WHICH WE HAVE ASKED FROM HIM. (1ST JOHN 5:15)

Verse 15 promises that we will get “whatever” we ask of God “*if we know that he hears us*.” What causes God to “hear us”? The preceding verse tells us.

AND THIS IS THE CONFIDENCE WHICH WE HAVE BEFORE HIM THAT, IF WE ASK ANYTHING ACCORDING TO HIS WILL, HE HEARS US. (1ST JOHN 5:14)

This is why Jesus could pray with confidence:

FATHER, I THANK YOU THAT YOU HAVE HEARD ME. I KNEW THAT YOU ALWAYS HEAR ME. (JOHN 11:41-42)

The Father always heard (answered) Jesus when He prayed because Jesus always prayed according to the will of His Father.

AND HE WAS SAYING, “ABBA! FATHER! ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE FOR YOU. REMOVE THIS CUP FROM ME; YET NOT WHAT I WILL, BUT WHAT YOU WILL.” (MARK 14:36)

The Amount of Faith

Have you ever heard someone say, “The reason he did not get what he prayed for is because he did not have *enough* faith”? If by the word “enough” he meant, “... he did not have *any* faith at all,” then he *may* be correct. But if he meant, “... he did not have *a strong enough* faith,” then you might call his attention to Matthew 17:19-20.

THEN THE DISCIPLES CAME TO JESUS PRIVATELY AND SAID, "WHY COULD WE NOT DRIVE (THE DEMON) OUT?" AND HE SAID TO THEM, "BECAUSE OF THE LITTLENES OF YOUR FAITH; FOR TRULY I SAY TO YOU, IF YOU HAVE FAITH THE SIZE OF A MUSTARD SEED, YOU WILL SAY TO THIS MOUNTAIN, 'MOVE FROM HERE TO THERE,' AND IT WILL MOVE; AND NOTHING WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE TO YOU. (MATTHEW 17:19-20)

Earlier, we stated that living by faith always has these three “elements”:

Faith always has an *object*.

This is the person or thing you are *trusting*.

Faith always has *content*.

This is what you are trusting the object of your faith *to do*.

And faith always has an *amount*.

This is the *level of trust* you have in the object of your faith.

We used the act of sitting down on a chair to illustrate what it means to live by faith. We said that every time you sit down, you exercise faith.

First, we identified the *object* of your faith to be the chair. The chair is *what* you are trusting. It is on what you are depending ... in what you have placed your confidence ... on what you are relying.

We then identified the *content* of your faith to be what the chair promises to *do*. It promises *to hold up your weight*.

We now come to the third element of faith: the *level of trust* you have in the object of your faith. Returning to our chair illustration, we said that the chair did not look strong. This, in turn, weakened your confidence in its ability to hold up your weight. Nevertheless, you veeeery slowly ... veeeery cautiously ... eeeased your weight down upon it. And to your relief, it held you up.

We should take note of something. The chair did not keep its promise to hold up your weight because of the strength of your faith (which was weak) but because of the strength of the chair (which was great). This small amount of faith in a strong chair was all it took for you to *benefit from* the chair’s promise. (If you did not have *any* faith in the chair’s strength, you would not have tried to sit on it, thus forfeiting its promised benefit.)

Likewise, the effectiveness of a Christian's prayer life is not determined by the *level* of his faith (whether it be a small amount ... or a great amount ... or somewhere in between). Rather, it is determined by the *Object* of his faith (an omnipotent God). "Mountains" are not moved by the strength of one's faith but by the strength of the one, true God. Only God almighty can – and will – move a mountain (that is, by His power He will grant one's request), providing it is *His will* to move the mountain.

MOVING MOUNTAINS REQUIRES ONLY A SMALL AMOUNT OF FAITH IN **A GREAT GOD**.

If one's prayers agree with the Lord's will, he can trust his all-powerful God to say "Yes" to his request ... even if his faith is the size of a mustard seed. But if one's prayers are *not* in alignment with the will of God, the answer will be "No," no matter how strong his faith is.⁹

A SMALL AMOUNT OF FAITH IN A GREAT GOD
IS SUFFICIENT FOR ONE TO BENEFIT FROM HIS PROMISES.

9

Even as you read this, there are "prayer warriors" throughout the world struggling with terminal illnesses. As they pray for healing, some will receive the answer "Yes." Others, although their faith is just as strong, will not experience healing ... at least on this side of the resurrection. For those who receive the answer "No," we can be sure that God has something better in mind for them.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED SO FAR

Our heavenly Father has made it clear. He wants His sons and daughters to live by faith.

*AS IT IS WRITTEN, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."
(ROMANS 1:17)*

*MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM.
(HEBREWS 10:38)*

To help us understand how to do so, we have considered the three "elements" of faith:

First, faith always has an *object*. This is the person or thing we are *trusting*.

GOD IS THE OBJECT OF OUR FAITH.
HE IS THE PERSON WE ARE TRUSTING.

Second, faith always has *content*. This is what you are trusting the object of your faith *to do*.

GOD PROMISES TO BE TRUE TO HIS UNCHANGING CHARACTER.
THIS IS WHAT WE ARE TRUSTING HIM TO **BE**.
IT IS (IN PART) THE CONTENT OF OUR FAITH.

AND

GOD PROMISES TO DO HIS PERFECT WILL.
THIS IS WHAT WE ARE TRUSTING HIM TO **DO**.
IT, TOO, IS (IN PART) THE CONTENT OF OUR FAITH.

And third, faith always has an *amount*. This is the *level of trust* we have in the object of our faith.

EVEN A SMALL (MUSTARD SEED) AMOUNT OF FAITH IN A GREAT GOD
IS SUFFICIENT FOR US TO BENEFIT FROM HIS PROMISES.

Therefore,

USING THE LEVEL OF FAITH WE HAVE,
(WHETHER A SMALL AMOUNT ... A GREAT AMOUNT ... OR SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN)

WE ARE TO TRUST GOD

TO BE TRUE TO HIS UNCHANGING CHARACTER

AND

TO DO HIS PERFECT WILL.

Since we are to trust God “to be true to His unchanging character” and “to do His perfect will,” we need to know what He is like and what He plans to do. Only then are we able to know how to live by faith. The rest of this series will develop these ideas in more detail. Let’s begin by learning *where* the content of our faith can be found. Where exactly should we look?

WHERE THE CONTENT OF OUR FAITH IS FOUND

The life of faith to which God has called us is not one giant leap after another into some dark unknown. It is a series of steps along the path of Light. We do not have to feel like we are guessing our way through life or always following the counsel of blind minds. Rather, we can have confidence that what we *believe* is true ... and what we *are* is upright ... and what we *do* is wise. That is because our guidance comes from the trustworthy *Word of God*.

YOUR WORD IS A LAMP TO MY FEET AND A LIGHT TO MY PATH. (PSALM 119:105)

The Word of God reveals the *attributes* of God. On every page of Scripture, what God expects us to believe about Him has been clearly revealed in black and white. Therefore, concerning His *perfections*, let us grip this truth firmly:

THE UNCHANGING CHARACTER OF GOD IS REVEALED IN **THE WORD OF GOD**¹⁰

Furthermore, the Word of God reveals the *will* of God. The pages of Scripture clearly describe His plans and desires for the world, for the Church, and for each of His sons and daughters:

- 1) through His promises¹¹
- 2) through His prophecies¹¹
- 3) through His moral laws¹²
- 4) and through His wise principles¹³

Therefore, let us cling to this fact with full assurance:

THE PERFECT WILL OF GOD IS REVEALED IN **THE WORD OF GOD**

¹⁰ The *attributes* of God are listed and explained in the author's work, "*The Everlasting Perfections of God*," Appendix B (pages 48-54).

¹¹ God's *promises* and *prophecies* are categorized and explained in this present work under the heading, "Appendix A: God's Assured Promises to the New Testament Church" (pages 64-140).

¹² God's *moral laws* are categorized in the author's work, "*Man's Stewardship of God's Truth*," under the heading, "The Commandments to the New Testament Church." (This work is not yet available.)

¹³ God's *wise principles* are discussed in this present work under the heading, "What We Can Trust God to Do in and through Us / As We Apply the Wisdom of God" (pages 44-47).

WHAT WE CAN TRUST GOD TO BE

Someone once said, "If you would like to make God laugh, just tell Him your plans."

Plans, of course, are good things to have, for without them, much of one's life would be aimless and, therefore, wasted. But the fact is, no one knows for sure what tomorrow will bring. Does anyone know the number of days God has ordained for his life? Or does anyone know the date of Christ's Return? How, then, can anyone know for certain where he will be this time tomorrow? Will he be alive on earth or will he be in eternity? How can someone know – with complete assurance – that God's will for his life is to go to this school or that school ... or to have this job or that job ... or to marry this person or that person?

COME NOW, YOU WHO SAY, "TODAY OR TOMORROW WE WILL GO TO SUCH AND SUCH A CITY, AND SPEND A YEAR THERE AND ENGAGE IN BUSINESS AND MAKE A PROFIT." YET YOU DO NOT KNOW WHAT YOUR LIFE WILL BE LIKE TOMORROW. YOU ARE JUST A VAPOR THAT APPEARS FOR A LITTLE WHILE AND THEN VANISHES AWAY. INSTEAD, YOU OUGHT TO SAY, "IF THE LORD WILLS, WE WILL LIVE AND ALSO DO THIS OR THAT."
(James 4:13-15)

It is wise, therefore, to present our personal requests to God with the *attitude*, "IF it be Your will" But as we do, is there not *anything* we can be sure of? In all this uncertainty, is there not any truth from God's Word in which we can set the anchor of our faith? Most surely, there is.

WE CAN BE SURE THAT GOD WILL BE TRUE TO HIS UNCHANGING CHARACTER.

The Unchanging Character of God

OR WHAT MAN IS THERE AMONG YOU WHO, WHEN HIS SON ASKS FOR A LOAF, WILL GIVE HIM A STONE? OR IF HE ASKS FOR A FISH, HE WILL NOT GIVE HIM A SNAKE, WILL HE? IF YOU THEN, BEING EVIL, KNOW HOW TO GIVE GOOD GIFTS TO YOUR CHILDREN, HOW MUCH MORE WILL YOUR FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN GIVE WHAT IS GOOD TO THOSE WHO ASK HIM! (MATTHEW 7:9-11)

Have you ever known someone to ask God for a "loaf" ... but he was given a "stone"? Or to ask Him for a "fish" ... but he was given a "snake"? I have not. I have known God to give a *different* gift than what was requested but never one that was *inferior*.

Or have you ever known someone to ask God for a "stone" (*thinking* he was asking for a "loaf"), and God gave him a stone? Or to ask God for a "snake" (*thinking* he was asking for a "fish"), and God gave him a snake? I have never known God to do that either. Any request that is less than what is best, He always says "No."

But I *have* known Him to give a loaf to those who ask for a loaf and a fish to those who ask for a fish. I have known God to do that. In fact, I have known many to ask God for a loaf or a fish and be given a seven-course meal.

Why is that? Why does God sometimes give us what we ask for (or even more) but at other times withhold from us what we request? The answer can be traced to *His character*. What He gives or what He withholds is determined by what He is like.

AS GOD IS ... SO GOD DOES.

This is true in *all* God does, including the way He answers our prayers. Whether He answers with a “Yes” or with a “No,” His response will never violate *His unchanging character*. We can trust Him to always be true to the Person He is, having perfections that are *clearly revealed in the Scriptures*.

Embedded within each answer to each prayer is the perfect love of God. His wisdom ... His mercy ... His grace ... His kindness ... His goodness ... His righteousness ... His purity ... truly, *all* God’s attributes are evident in the way He chooses to answer the prayers of His children.

EVERY GOOD THING GIVEN, AND EVERY PERFECT GIFT IS FROM ABOVE, COMING DOWN FROM THE FATHER OF LIGHTS. (JAMES 1:17)

Why can we trust our Father in heaven to give good and perfect gifts? Because *He* is good and perfect.

AS GOD IS ... SO GOD DOES.

However, it is not always *easy* to believe that God is the way the Scriptures have portrayed Him to be. The pain we experience during the testing of our faith might tempt us to believe that He is something less than the Bible’s description of Him.

If we feel like our lives are falling apart, we may slip into the belief that “God is not as loving as I have been led to believe.”

Or if He withholds something from us or if He does not act as quickly as we think He should, we might conclude “God is not as sovereign as I thought He was. And if He is, then the saying, ‘God is good all the time; and all the time, God is good’ is wrong.”

The purpose of these trials, of course, is not to tear us down but to build us up.

CONSIDER IT ALL JOY, MY BRETHREN, WHEN YOU ENCOUNTER VARIOUS TRIALS, KNOWING THAT THE TESTING OF YOUR FAITH PRODUCES ENDURANCE. AND LET ENDURANCE HAVE ITS PERFECT RESULT, SO THAT YOU MAY BE PERFECT AND COMPLETE, LACKING IN NOTHING. (JAMES 1:2-4)

But if we are not yet familiar with the Lord's ways (perhaps we are new converts), suffering can have an unsettling effect on our faith. These "stress tests" tend to distort the way we view God ... that in some way He is inferior to the picture we have of Him from His Word.

It is at this point that we have a decision to make. Are we going to believe these lies, that "God has let us down" (and by doing so, wallow in despair)? Or are we going to dismiss those thoughts and stand firm, trusting Him to be what His Word insists that He is (and by doing so, soar in triumph)? No matter how *we* respond to these trials, *God* will not – He cannot – stray from His unchanging character.

FOR I, THE LORD, DO NOT CHANGE (MALACHI 3:6)

Beloved family in Christ, God promises to be true to Himself. This is what we can trust Him to *be*. This is (in part) the *content* of our faith. Therefore,

USING THE LEVEL OF FAITH WE HAVE
(WHETHER A SMALL AMOUNT ... A GREAT AMOUNT ... OR SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN)

WE ARE TO TRUST GOD

¹ **TO BE TRUE TO HIS UNCHANGING CHARACTER.**
(NO MATTER HOW OUR *CIRCUMSTANCES* MAKE US FEEL)

This is (in part) what it means for the just to live by faith.

WHAT WE CAN TRUST GOD TO DO

The Assured Promises of God

GOD IS NOT A MAN, THAT HE SHOULD LIE, NOR A SON OF MAN, THAT HE SHOULD REPENT. HAS HE SAID, AND WILL HE NOT DO IT? OR HAS HE SPOKEN, AND WILL HE NOT MAKE IT GOOD? (NUMBERS 23:19)

“Catch Me Pa” ¹⁴

On October 3rd, 1960, CBS television network aired the first episode of a series that has since been ranked by “TV Guide” magazine as the ninth best show in American television history. *The Andy Griffith Show* is about a small rural town, populated by a host of loveable citizens whose comical mishaps are kept in check by the watchful eye of a homespun, but wise, sheriff.

If you have ever watched this show, you are aware of the special relationship Sheriff Andy Taylor has with his young son Opie. This father has invested considerable time in his son’s life to the point that Opie trusts his “Pa” without question.

In one episode there is a scene that demonstrates this trust. Opie is in Sheriff Taylor’s jailhouse office. He has just finished lunch and is about to return to school. But before he leaves, he looks up at his father and says, “Catch me, Pa?” And Andy says, “Well, OK; but just once.” So, Opie climbs up on his father’s desk ... Andy backs away from the desk about three feet ... he holds out his arms ... and Opie jumps.

It is such a simple scene that, if we are not paying attention, we will miss a wonderful illustration of faith:

First, when Opie positions himself on the edge of the desk, he does not look down at the floor and hesitate. No, as soon as he climbs onto the desk, he immediately jumps.

Nor does he ask his father, “You *are* going to catch me, right Pa?” Opie knew that his father would keep his promise to catch him.

We have not seen the many times this young boy had jumped into the arms of his father standing three feet away; but we can assume that this “jump and catch” routine has been repeated often. (Andy must set a limit on the number of times he will play this game just to get his son back to school on time.) And every time Opie jumped, Andy caught him. This father had proved his faithfulness to his son over and over.

¹⁴ An excerpt from the author’s work, “*The God of Our Lives*,” Yahweh (Part 2): God Is Faithful, pages 17-18.

The Bible reveals another Father's faithfulness. With perfect consistency, God the Father remains committed to fulfilling His perfect will, a will that the pages of Scripture clearly reveal.

One aspect of His will is the *promises* the Father has made to His children. These assurances are (in part) what we can trust God to *do*. They form (in part) the *content* of our faith.

An Over-the-Horizon Expectation

*YOUR LOVINGKINDNESS, O LORD, EXTENDS TO THE HEAVENS;
YOUR FAITHFULNESS REACHES TO THE SKIES. (PSALM 36:5)*

To "live by faith rather than by sight" is to turn each day into an adventure. It is to go through life with a sense of *confident anticipation*, assured of something you cannot see ... but you know it is coming. This is the effect God's promises have on a believing heart. While the unbelieving world wallows in its emptiness and despair, the *guarantees* of God invigorate the person of faith, giving each day an over-the-horizon expectation.

Consider, for example, God's promise to meet *all the needs* of those who participate in the Great Commission through financial or material giving. From the missionary Paul we read

BUT I HAVE RECEIVED EVERYTHING IN FULL AND HAVE AN ABUNDANCE; I AM AMPLY SUPPLIED, HAVING RECEIVED FROM EPAPHRODITUS WHAT YOU HAVE SENT, A FRAGRANT AROMA, AN ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE, WELL-PLEASING TO GOD. AND MY GOD WILL SUPPLY ALL YOUR NEEDS ACCORDING TO HIS RICHES IN GLORY IN CHRIST JESUS. (PHILIPPIANS 4:18-19)

When this promise reaches a believing heart, his soul becomes "lighter." This is especially true for the one who must stretch every penny of his paycheck just to pay for life's essentials. A sense of joy – even intrigue – fills his heart, wondering how and when God will keep His Word.

A Long-Term Patience

At this point a dose of reality should be offered. Waiting for God to do what He said He would do sometimes involves *long-term patience*. Take for example God's promise of a son to Abraham and Sarah.

NOW THE LORD SAID TO ABRAM, "GO FORTH FROM YOUR COUNTRY ... TO THE LAND WHICH I WILL SHOW YOU; AND I WILL MAKE YOU A GREAT NATION" NOW ABRAM WAS SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS OLD WHEN HE DEPARTED FROM HARAN. (GENESIS 12:1-2, 4)

THEN THE LORD TOOK NOTE OF SARAH AS HE HAD SAID, AND THE LORD DID FOR SARAH AS HE HAD PROMISED. SO SARAH CONCEIVED AND BORE A SON TO ABRAHAM IN HIS OLD AGE ... NOW ABRAHAM WAS ONE HUNDRED YEARS OLD WHEN HIS SON ISAAC WAS BORN TO HIM. (GENESIS 21:1-2, 5)

For 25 years, this chosen couple waited for their promised son Isaac. Perhaps it started out as “an adventure in faith”; but with each passing year, the postponement of this promise’s fulfillment would have been an increasing strain on their patience. Indeed, not once but twice, this couple offered to *help* Yahweh (the all-powerful One Who created the heavens and the earth!) to follow through on His promise (Genesis 15:1-4; 16:1-3)!

It is true. Humanly speaking, time was not on their side. But between the giving of the promise and its fulfillment, there were priceless, enduring lessons to learn ... lessons that required time to process and believe.

*WITHOUT BECOMING WEAK IN FAITH (ABRAHAM) CONTEMPLATED HIS OWN BODY, NOW AS GOOD AS DEAD SINCE HE WAS ABOUT A HUNDRED YEARS OLD, AND THE DEADNESS OF SARAH'S WOMB; YET, WITH RESPECT TO THE PROMISE OF GOD, HE DID NOT WAVER IN UNBELIEF BUT **GREW** STRONG IN FAITH, GIVING GLORY TO GOD, AND BEING FULLY ASSURED THAT WHAT GOD HAD PROMISED, HE WAS ABLE ALSO TO PERFORM. (ROMANS 4:19-21)*

*BY FAITH EVEN SARAH HERSELF RECEIVED ABILITY TO CONCEIVE, EVEN BEYOND THE PROPER TIME OF LIFE, SINCE SHE CONSIDERED HIM FAITHFUL WHO HAD PROMISED (THOUGH EARLIER SHE HAD **LAUGHED AT THE IDEA**, GENESIS 18:12). THEREFORE THERE WAS BORN EVEN OF ONE MAN, AND HIM AS GOOD AS DEAD AT THAT, AS MANY DESCENDANTS AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE. (HEBREWS 11:11-12)*

The faithful One can fulfill His promises, even if it means interrupting His Own natural laws to do so (that is, even if it takes a miracle). We know that. Why then is it so hard at times for us to trust God?

Maybe it is because we have grown wary of believing someone’s word. We know all too well what it feels like when a trusted friend reveals sensitive information to others ... or when verbal work contracts are ignored ... or when wedding vows are broken ... or when appointments are not kept. In fact, it has come to the point that when someone does what he says he will do, we are surprised.

We have become so accustomed to being disappointed by others (including other believers) that we assume that *no can* be trusted (including our heavenly Father). But that is a lie. Satan, the father of lies, wants us to believe that if we “jump toward the open arms” of God, He will drop us just like most everyone else has.

But God is the one Person we *can* trust. In fact, we are going to spend our entire Christian lives learning this one truth: that with each situation we face, our God is faithful. However, unlike Sheriff Andy Taylor’s “three-foot, jump and catch” routine with his son, the Faithful One “backs away from us” *just a little farther* each time. And each time comes the promise,

“I WILL CATCH YOU IF YOU JUST COMMIT YOURSELF TO THE JUMP.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, God will do what He says He will do. He will not break His Word. His promises carry the weight of a rock-solid guarantee. He will not go back on them. They are as good as done.

Therefore,

USING THE LEVEL OF FAITH WE HAVE,
(WHETHER A SMALL AMOUNT ... A GREAT AMOUNT ... OR SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN)

WE ARE TO TRUST GOD

¹ TO BE TRUE TO HIS UNCHANGING CHARACTER

AND

² TO KEEP HIS ASSURED PROMISES.

This is (in part) what it means for the just to live by faith. ¹⁵

¹⁵ It may be that we are not living this kind of life because we do not *know* what He has promised us in His Word or because we have not been *deliberate in applying these promises* to our lives.

The list presented in the "Appendix A: God's Assured Promises to the New Testament Church" (pages 64-140) is not complete. Nevertheless, its purpose is to give us a sample of what God plans to do on behalf of His Name, His beloved people, and the world in general.

WHAT WE CAN TRUST GOD TO DO

The Unfailing Prophecies of God

“Do Not Let Your Heart Be Troubled” ¹⁶

DO NOT LET YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED. BELIEVE IN GOD, BELIEVE ALSO IN ME. (JOHN 14:1)

Do you keep up with world events? If so, does it seem to you that something worse-than-usual is taking place? It is getting meaner out there: more wicked ... more perverse ... more violent. Something akin to the days of Noah (Genesis 6:5-8). The entire world seems to be rushing pell-mell into chaos. It is as though something evil – and intelligent – has been turned loose upon the nations:

political turmoil, mob rebellion, ethnic cleansing, international tensions, global terrorism, threats of nuclear war ...

computer hackers, identity thieves, economic instability ...

unbridled sexual perversions, drug abuse, murder ...

pandemics, earthquakes, wildfires, floods, polar ice cap melting / rising sea levels, famine-producing droughts.

Turmoil is on the rise. It is out of control, and it is *global*. Furthermore, no government or human agency seems capable of restoring order from this chaos. The issues are just too broad, too complex, too intense for the ingenuity of man to solve. If it were not for the restraining hand of our sovereign God, events would spiral completely out of control on every front.

But there is something about this encroaching darkness we should not overlook. With each news report, God’s promises to the true and living Church grow brighter and brighter. As the world continues its reckless race toward destruction, we whom God has redeemed by the blood of The Lamb would be wise to lock our attention on these assurances:

- His prophesied blessing of an *eternal residence in the Father’s palace*

IN MY FATHER’S HOUSE ARE MANY DWELLING PLACES. IF IT WERE NOT SO, I WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU; FOR I GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU. (JOHN 14:2)

¹⁶ Taken from the website, Steward of Truth Publications (www.stewardoftruth.com), the author’s blog, “The Dazzling Promises of a Faithful God,” July 15th, 2015.

- His prophesied blessing of *the Savior's return for us*

IF I GO AND PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU, I WILL COME AGAIN AND RECEIVE YOU TO MYSELF, THAT WHERE I AM, THERE YOU MAY BE ALSO. (JOHN 14:3)

- His prophesied blessing of *a body changed from clay to glory*

WE WILL ALL BE CHANGED, IN A MOMENT, IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE, AT THE LAST TRUMPET. FOR THE TRUMPET WILL SOUND, AND THE DEAD WILL BE RAISED IMPERISHABLE, AND WE WILL BE CHANGED. FOR THIS PERISHABLE MUST PUT ON THE IMPERISHABLE, AND THIS MORTAL MUST PUT ON IMMORTALITY. (1ST CORINTHIANS 15:51-53)

- His prophesied blessing of *a new earth*

THEN I SAW A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH; FOR THE FIRST HEAVEN AND THE FIRST EARTH PASSED AWAY, AND THERE IS NO LONGER ANY SEA. (REVELATION 21:1)

This blueprint for our future is not a wishful, pie-in-the-sky dream. It is a bedrock fact, based upon the integrity of God's character, upheld by the trustworthiness of His Word, and confirmed by the resurrection of His Son. The fulfillment of every one of these prophecies awaits the reborn follower of Jesus Christ. Why should we believe that? Because our God is faithful. He keeps His Word.

So, as those who reject the Cross of Jesus watch the world (*for which* they live) fall apart, let *them* pace the floor at night. But let those of us who have fled to the saving grace of God run in the strength of Christ ... and with the courage of Christ ... and with the composure of Christ.

And let us all get a good night's sleep. After all, faith in the unfailing prophecies of our sovereign God makes for a soft pillow.

God's Blueprint for the Future

God is sovereign over the affairs of His creation. He plans and directs every detail, including the unfolding of world history. This explains how God can reveal to man events that have not yet occurred. He knows the future because He is the One *creating* the future.

... I AM GOD, AND THERE IS NO OTHER; I AM GOD AND THERE IS NO ONE LIKE ME ... MY PURPOSE WILL BE ESTABLISHED, AND I WILL ACCOMPLISH ALL MY GOOD PLEASURE ... TRULY I HAVE SPOKEN; TRULY I WILL BRING IT TO PASS. I HAVE PLANNED IT, SURELY I WILL DO IT. (ISAIAH 46:9-11)

As with all other aspects of His will, God has chosen to reveal His prophetic plan through His Word. Yet, this "blueprint for the future" has *not been fully revealed*. There is much that God has kept hidden. In His wisdom, He knows that it is not yet time for that unveiling.

Nevertheless, God *has* revealed a portion of His prophetic program, information of which we are to be faithful stewards. That is, what He has shown us should not be ignored. We do not have the right to dismiss the study of prophecy because it is “too difficult to understand.” Whatever He has chosen to reveal, He expects His Church to *pursue* an understanding of it.

Why Does God Want Us to Know His Will for the Future?

To be prepared to face God

The Bible informs us of an evaluation to which every *believer* will be summoned. There, before the Judgment Seat of Christ, we will all bow to give an account of our *stewardship*.

*SO THEN EACH ONE OF US WILL GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF TO GOD. (ROMANS 14:12)*¹⁷

This evaluation will result in either a gain or a loss of eternal rewards, depending upon *the quality and motive of our labor*. We would do well, therefore, to conduct ourselves with a view toward this approaching judgment.

*NOW HE WHO PLANTS AND HE WHO WATERS ARE ONE; BUT EACH WILL RECEIVE HIS OWN REWARD ACCORDING TO HIS OWN LABOR. FOR WE ARE GOD'S FELLOW WORKERS; YOU ARE GOD'S FIELD, GOD'S BUILDING. ACCORDING TO THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH WAS GIVEN TO ME, 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. NOW IF ANY MAN BUILDS ON THE FOUNDATION WITH GOLD, SILVER, PRECIOUS STONES, WOOD, HAY, STRAW, EACH MAN'S WORK WILL BECOME EVIDENT; FOR THE DAY WILL SHOW IT BECAUSE IT IS TO BE REVEALED WITH FIRE, AND THE FIRE ITSELF WILL TEST **THE QUALITY** OF EACH MAN'S WORK. IF ANY MAN'S WORK WHICH HE HAS BUILT ON IT REMAINS, HE WILL RECEIVE A REWARD. IF ANY MAN'S WORK IS BURNED UP, HE WILL SUFFER LOSS; BUT HE HIMSELF WILL BE SAVED, YET SO AS THROUGH FIRE. (1ST CORINTHIANS 3:8-15)*¹⁸

*THEREFORE DO NOT GO ON PASSING JUDGMENT BEFORE THE TIME BUT WAIT UNTIL THE LORD COMES WHO WILL BOTH BRING TO LIGHT THE THINGS HIDDEN IN THE DARKNESS AND DISCLOSE **THE MOTIVES** OF MEN'S HEARTS; AND THEN EACH MAN'S PRAISE WILL COME TO HIM FROM GOD. (1ST CORINTHIANS 4:5)*

So then, one of the Lord's reasons for revealing His prophetic plan is to motivate the believer to prepare himself for this evaluation of his stewardship (i.e., his life and service in Christ's Name).

¹⁷ Because the Death of Christ paid the penalty of each believer's sins, the account we will give of ourselves at Christ's Judgment Seat does *not* pertain to our sins. The blood of our Savior has fully and forever washed away those crimes. "Their sins and lawless deeds I will remember no more" (Hebrews 10:17).

¹⁸ The believer is *saved* by *grace*; but he will be *rewarded* according to the faithfulness of his *works*.

To be strengthened and comforted during spiritual battle

Another reason for revealing to us certain specifics of His prophetic plan is to fortify and reassure us as we face adversity.

*BUT WE DO NOT WANT YOU TO BE UNINFORMED, BRETHREN, ABOUT THOSE WHO ARE ASLEEP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT GRIEVE AS DO THE REST WHO HAVE NO HOPE. FOR IF WE BELIEVE THAT JESUS DIED AND ROSE AGAIN, EVEN SO GOD WILL BRING WITH HIM THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP IN JESUS. FOR THIS WE SAY TO YOU BY THE WORD OF THE LORD, THAT WE WHO ARE ALIVE AND REMAIN UNTIL THE COMING OF THE LORD, WILL NOT PRECEDE THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP. FOR THE LORD HIMSELF WILL DESCEND FROM HEAVEN WITH A SHOUT, WITH THE VOICE OF THE ARCHANGEL AND WITH THE TRUMPET OF GOD, AND THE DEAD IN CHRIST WILL RISE FIRST. THEN WE WHO ARE ALIVE AND REMAIN WILL BE CAUGHT UP TOGETHER WITH THEM IN THE CLOUDS TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR, AND SO WE SHALL ALWAYS BE WITH THE LORD. THEREFORE **COMFORT** ONE ANOTHER WITH THESE WORDS. (1ST THESSALONIANS 4:13-18)*

To believe God's revealed "blueprint for the future" strengthens the Church of God to persevere in a spiritual war we have already won (through Christ) but, at times, *seem* to be losing. We need to be reminded

that we will eventually *experience* the fullness of victory over all our adversaries

that our sense of justice will be satisfied when God avenges the wrongs committed against His children

of our eternal home and the One in charge of our safe arrival there

to look beyond this world's present distresses to the "eternal weight of glory" that awaits us (2ND CORINTHIANS 4:17-18)

A second purpose of prophecy, then, is to strengthen and comfort believers as they face persecutions from a hostile *world*, temptations from their *flesh*, and oppressions from the *demonic realm*.

USING THE LEVEL OF FAITH WE HAVE,
(WHETHER A SMALL AMOUNT ... A GREAT AMOUNT ... OR SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN)

WE ARE TO TRUST GOD

¹ TO BE TRUE TO HIS UNCHANGING CHARACTER,

² TO KEEP HIS ASSURED PROMISES,

AND

³ TO FULFILL HIS UNFAILING PROPHECIES.

This is (in part) what it means for the just to live by faith.

WHAT WE CAN TRUST GOD TO DO IN AND THROUGH US

Simply put, to live by faith is *to trust God to be true to His character and to do His will.*

To be sure, God *is* the Owner, the Visionary, the Strategist, the Designer, the Administrator, and the Builder of His will. And, of course, He is the One Who carries out His will. But He is often not the only “participant.” By His marvelous grace, He has given His Church the extraordinary privilege of joining Him in the fulfillment of that will.

He did not have to do that. He did not have to involve us in the execution of His plans. He could have done everything Himself without using any of His creatures. Or He could have worked only through the angelic population. So, before we rush past this amazing truth, we should pause to let it sink in.

THE ALL-POWERFUL SOVEREIGN HAS GRACIOUSLY GIVEN HIS PEOPLE THE PRIVILEGE
OF PARTICIPATING WITH HIM IN THE FULFILLMENT OF HIS WILL. ¹⁹

To convert us from spectators to stewards, our Lord *entrusted* His people with certain resources to carry out certain *responsibilities*. And He *expects* us to be faithful to the tasks to which He has called us.

IT IS REQUIRED OF STEWARDS THAT ONE BE FOUND TRUSTWORTHY. (1ST CORINTHIANS 4:2)

Beloved brothers and sisters, this privilege to participate with God in the fulfillment of His will is no small matter. It carries with it, of course, the weight of *accountability*, for

EACH ONE OF US WILL GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF TO GOD (ROMANS 14:12).

But it also carries with it a sense of *honor*. We should consider this priceless gift to be an investment of our lives that will pay – throughout eternity – dividends of *glory*, for

THEN (AT THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST) EACH MAN'S PRAISE WILL COME TO HIM FROM GOD. (1ST CORINTHIANS 4:5)

¹⁹ The above discussion answers the question, “If God is going to do what He wants to do, then why should I even bother to pray?” (“Has God Ever Said ‘No’ to You,” page 7)

WHAT WE CAN TRUST GOD TO DO IN AND THROUGH US

As We Strengthen the Church of God

Our gracious God has given us *several* ways we can “join Him” as He strengthens His Church. Each ministry is a stewardship, a responsibility with which the Christian has been entrusted.

Stewards of the Gospel

Believers are responsible to explain the Gospel to unbelievers. This is the means God uses to rescue those who are trapped in the bondage and death of Satan’s kingdom and to release them into the freedom and life of His Own kingdom.

FOR THE SCRIPTURE SAYS, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." FOR THERE IS NO DISTINCTION BETWEEN JEW AND GREEK; FOR THE SAME LORD IS LORD OF ALL, ABOUNDING IN RICHES FOR ALL WHO CALL ON HIM; FOR "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." HOW THEN WILL THEY CALL ON HIM IN WHOM THEY HAVE NOT BELIEVED? HOW WILL THEY BELIEVE IN HIM WHOM THEY HAVE NOT HEARD? AND HOW WILL THEY HEAR WITHOUT A PREACHER? HOW WILL THEY PREACH UNLESS THEY ARE SENT? JUST AS IT IS WRITTEN, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!" (ROMANS 10:11-15)

Stewards of Prayer

Believers are responsible to submit their *personal* requests to God through prayer *while submitting to His will* in all matters. This also applies to intercessory prayer on behalf of *others*. Prayer is another way the Church can participate with God as He ministers to mankind.

FINALLY, BRETHREN, PRAY FOR US THAT THE WORD OF THE LORD WILL SPREAD RAPIDLY AND BE GLORIFIED, JUST AS IT DID ALSO WITH YOU; AND THAT WE WILL BE RESCUED FROM PERVERSE AND EVIL MEN; FOR NOT ALL HAVE FAITH. (2ND THESSALONIANS 3:1-2; SEE ALSO EPHESIANS 6:18-20; COLOSSIANS 4:2-4)

Stewards of Spiritual Gifts

Believers are responsible to use their spiritual gifts within their local church. This is the means God uses to enrich and strengthen His people in the fullness of Christ and to equip them for spiritual service.

AS EACH ONE HAS RECEIVED A SPECIAL GIFT, EMPLOY IT IN SERVING ONE ANOTHER AS GOOD STEWARDS OF THE MANIFOLD GRACE OF GOD. WHOEVER SPEAKS, IS TO DO SO AS ONE WHO IS SPEAKING THE UTTERANCES OF GOD. WHOEVER SERVES IS TO DO SO AS ONE WHO IS SERVING BY THE STRENGTH WHICH GOD SUPPLIES, SO THAT IN ALL THINGS GOD MAY BE GLORIFIED THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, TO WHOM BELONGS THE GLORY AND DOMINION FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN. (1ST PETER 4:10-11)

Stewards of Material Resources

Believers are responsible for providing material goods to those who are *unable* to meet their own *needs*. This holds true for “all people, especially to those who are of the household of the faith” (Galatians 6:10). In doing so the Church’s message of God’s concern for the world (as evidenced by the gift of His Son) is validated. Furthermore, collecting gifts of money and distributing them to missionaries on the field is another way the Church can participate with God in spreading the Gospel.

LET LOVE BE WITHOUT HYPOCRISY ... CONTRIBUTING TO THE NEEDS OF THE SAINTS. (ROMANS 12:9, 13)

FOR I TESTIFY THAT ACCORDING TO THEIR ABILITY, AND BEYOND THEIR ABILITY, THEY GAVE OF THEIR OWN ACCORD, BEGGING US WITH MUCH URGING FOR THE FAVOR OF PARTICIPATION IN THE SUPPORT OF THE SAINTS (2nd CORINTHIANS 8:3-4)

Stewards of the Armor of God

Believers are responsible to wear the battle gear of God while in the throes of demonic assault. This is the means God uses to defend His Church as She faces the onslaught of spiritual warfare.

PUT ON THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD, SO THAT YOU WILL BE ABLE TO STAND FIRM AGAINST THE SCHEMES OF THE DEVIL. 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. (EPHESIANS 6:11-13)

Therefore,

USING THE LEVEL OF FAITH WE HAVE,
(WHETHER A SMALL AMOUNT ... A GREAT AMOUNT ... OR SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN)

WE ARE TO TRUST GOD

¹ TO BE TRUE TO HIS UNCHANGING CHARACTER,

² TO KEEP HIS ASSURED PROMISES,

³ TO FULFILL HIS UNFAILING PROPHECIES,

AND

TO PROVIDE US WITH HIS WISDOM, HIS MOTIVATION, AND HIS POWER

⁴ TO STRENGTHEN HIS CHURCH.

This is (in part) what it means for the just to live by faith.

WHAT WE CAN TRUST GOD TO DO IN AND THROUGH US

As We Radiate the Righteousness of God

Stewards of God's Moral Will

FINALLY, THEN, BRETHREN, WE REQUEST AND EXHORT YOU IN THE LORD JESUS, THAT AS YOU RECEIVED FROM US INSTRUCTION AS TO HOW YOU OUGHT TO WALK AND PLEASE GOD (JUST AS YOU ACTUALLY DO WALK), THAT YOU EXCEL STILL MORE. FOR YOU KNOW WHAT COMMANDMENTS WE GAVE YOU BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE LORD JESUS. FOR THIS IS THE WILL OF GOD, YOUR SANCTIFICATION
(1ST THESSALONIANS 4:1-3)

The Lord Jesus has entrusted His New Testament Church with certain commandments (*"instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God"*). We are stewards of His moral will; and as such, we have an *active* role to play in saying "No" to sin and "Yes" to obedience.

SO THEN, MY BELOVED, JUST AS YOU HAVE ALWAYS OBEYED, NOT AS IN MY PRESENCE ONLY, BUT NOW MUCH MORE IN MY ABSENCE, WORK OUT YOUR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING (PHILIPPIANS 2:12)

At this point we should take care not to stray from sound doctrine. Having given us these commandments, we are not told to work *for* our salvation (legalism) but to work *out* the salvation God has already given us through faith. These "works" are not the *cause* of our salvation; they are the *result* of our salvation (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Furthermore, observe the *attitude* that should accompany this lifestyle. There is nothing casual about it. We are to take this responsibility seriously, "with fear and trembling," for in doing so, the Holy Spirit Who lives in us will glorify God, validate the Gospel, and restore our lives.

To Glorify God

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE BEFORE MEN IN SUCH A WAY THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS AND GLORIFY YOUR FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN. (MATTHEW 5:16)

... HE WHO PRACTICES THE TRUTH COMES TO THE LIGHT, SO THAT HIS DEEDS MAY BE MANIFESTED AS HAVING BEEN WROUGHT IN GOD. (JOHN 3:21)

We may have never considered ourselves as such, but the fact is, every believer is to be a walking, breathing Bible (the only Bible many will ever "read"). We have been left on earth to be a living portrait of Christ. The more fully our lives radiate His character, the more clearly this dead world can observe the living God. Not the small god their self-centered minds imagine Him to be ... or the false god a false teacher taught them to believe in ... but the God He really is, the God of the Bible.

To Validate the Gospel

There is another reason God did not call us to our heavenly home the second we were saved. He has a message for the world ... and He wants us to deliver it (Mathew 28:19-20).

First, He wants the world to know that He loves them (John 3:16). He also wants the world to know that love is not His only perfection. He wants them to know that He is also a God of justice (Psalm 37:28); and because of that, He hates their sins (Romans 1:18-19). He wants them to know that their acts of moral failure are, in His sight, capital crimes deserving capital punishment (Romans 6:23a) ... that He has every intention of executing that sentence of death (2nd Thessalonians 1:6-9) ... that it will be carried out in an eternal lake of fire (Revelation 20:15) ...

and that there is *not one thing they can do* to solve this problem.

But God can ... and has. God also wants His Church to explain to the world that **He** has provided a way for them to be pardoned from their sentence of death ... that He sent His only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be executed in their place (Romans 5:8; 1st Peter 2:24) ... that *by depending on His Payment of death for their sins*, all their crimes against Him would be forgiven – fully and forever (Colossians 2:13-14) ... and that in place of eternal death, they would be given eternal life (John 11:25; 6:40) ... not by earning it through their own good works ... but by receiving from the hand of God this priceless gift *through faith (and faith alone)* in what Jesus Christ has done for them (Ephesians 2:8-9) ...

and that there is *not one sin in their past too great* to exclude them from His merciful pardon.

This is our commission; and dear friends, this message is far superior to being “Good News.” What an understatement! This is “Priceless News”! It is “Exceedingly Magnificent News”! It is “Over-the-Top Fantastic News”!

But why should they listen to us? Were we not just like them? Yes, we were. But that was then; and this is now. Having become “partakers of the divine (new) nature” (2nd Peter 1:2-4), the spiritual poverty that presently engulfs them is no longer a burden to us. Our *hearts* that were once weighed down with guilt and the dread of death are now at peace with God. Our *minds* that were once filled with perversion and confusion now have an increasing sense of purity and clarity of thought. Our *souls* that were once flooded with misery now enjoy a holy refreshment.

All that, of course, describes what is taking place on the *inside* of a true believer. But what is on the inside **will** increasingly shine forth on the *outside*. Through faith in the Holy Spirit’s power, everything about us **will** increasingly display the life of Christ that is within us: our attitudes, our speech, our conduct ... everything. (It is a lifelong process.) And as those whose lives have been ruined by sin compare themselves to those whose lives are brand new, these broken people have a clear picture of *the only hope they have*, God’s redemption through His Son Jesus Christ.

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 stakes are high: eternal death or eternal life. God's message of deliverance is trustworthy: the Gospel. And the greatest validation of that message is this: *your* transformed life.

To Restore Our Lives

Many have grown up believing that if revival is to take place in our lives and churches, a guest speaker must conduct a week-long conference on a fascinating subject such as apologetics or prophecy or marriage or finances. And if all of us would just learn more about this interesting subject, then all of us would be "fired up for Christ."

But spiritual growth does not take place simply by accumulating more knowledge. It occurs when *we trust the indwelling Spirit of God to provide what we need to obey the will of the Father: His wisdom, His motivation, and His power.* As we prove ourselves faithful stewards of the Truth we **already** know, then – and only then – will our lives experience an abiding inner joy, a deepening insight of God's Truth, and a stability that surpasses human comprehension.

IF YOU KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS, YOU WILL ABIDE IN MY LOVE; JUST AS I HAVE KEPT MY FATHER'S COMMANDMENTS AND ABIDE IN HIS LOVE. THESE THINGS I HAVE SPOKEN TO YOU SO THAT MY JOY MAY BE IN YOU, AND THAT YOUR JOY MAY BE MADE FULL. (JOHN 15:10-11)

ONLY A LIFE OF OBEDIENCE,
EMPOWERED BY A LIVING FAITH,
WILL EXPERIENCE SPIRITUAL VITALITY.

To glorify God. To validate the Gospel. And to restore our lives. These are the reasons we should take seriously the command to "work out (our) salvation with fear and trembling."

But we have a problem. We have been commanded to do the impossible.

The Impossible Stewardship of Obedience

When God commanded us to "work out our salvation," He entrusted us with an impossible task. Not one of us has what it takes to say "No" to sin and "Yes" to the *perfect righteousness of God*. Although we want to, *our flesh* does not have the power to obey the moral will of God. The fact is,

ONLY GOD HAS THE POWER TO OBEY GOD.

KEEP WATCHING AND PRAYING THAT YOU MAY NOT COME INTO TEMPTATION; THE SPIRIT IS WILLING, BUT THE FLESH IS WEAK. (MARK 14:38)

FOR WHAT I AM DOING, I DO NOT UNDERSTAND; FOR I AM NOT PRACTICING WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO DO, BUT I AM DOING THE VERY THING I HATE ... FOR I KNOW THAT NOTHING GOOD DWELLS IN ME, THAT IS, IN MY FLESH; FOR THE WILLING IS PRESENT IN ME, BUT THE DOING OF THE GOOD IS NOT. FOR THE GOOD THAT I WANT, I DO NOT DO, BUT I PRACTICE THE VERY EVIL THAT I DO NOT WANT ... I FIND THEN THE PRINCIPLE THAT EVIL IS PRESENT IN ME, THE ONE WHO WANTS TO DO GOOD. FOR I JOYFULLY CONCUR WITH THE LAW OF GOD IN THE INNER MAN, BUT I SEE A DIFFERENT LAW IN THE MEMBERS OF MY BODY, WAGING WAR AGAINST THE LAW OF MY MIND AND MAKING ME A PRISONER OF THE LAW OF SIN WHICH IS IN MY MEMBERS.
(ROMANS 7:15, 18-19, 21-23)

But why would God leave us in this weakened condition? At the time of our salvation, why did He not strengthen our *flesh* to match the willingness of our *spirit*? Is it not because

THE LEVEL OF OUR *WEAKNESS* OFTEN DETERMINES THE LEVEL OF OUR *DEPENDENCE* UPON GOD

What better way to teach us to cling to God by faith than by commanding us to do something **we** know we cannot do in our own strength. God does not want us to depend upon ourselves to live out the righteousness of Christ. He wants us to trust the Spirit of God to provide us with everything we need to do the will of the Father.

*SO THEN, MY BELOVED ... WORK OUT YOUR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING; FOR IT IS **GOD** WHO IS AT WORK IN YOU, BOTH TO WILL AND TO WORK FOR HIS GOOD PLEASURE.* (PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13)

How, then, do we participate with God in displaying the glory of His righteousness to a despairing world? What is *our role* in fulfilling this impossible stewardship of obedience?

USING THE LEVEL OF FAITH WE HAVE,
(WHETHER A SMALL AMOUNT ... A GREAT AMOUNT ... OR SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN)

WE ARE TO TRUST GOD

¹ TO BE TRUE TO HIS UNCHANGING CHARACTER,

² TO KEEP HIS ASSURED PROMISES,

³ TO FULFILL HIS UNFAILING PROPHECIES,

AND

TO PROVIDE US WITH **HIS WISDOM, HIS MOTIVATION, AND HIS POWER**

⁴ TO STRENGTHEN HIS CHURCH,

AND

⁵ TO OBEY **HIS MORAL LAWS.**

This is (in part) what it means for the just to live by faith.

WHAT WE CAN TRUST GOD TO DO IN AND THROUGH US

As We Apply the Wisdom of God

Throughout life, a believer will face all kinds of decisions. Some are moral in nature, whereas others are not. Concerning his moral choices, he will find that each one has an *eternal impact* on his life and – almost always – others' lives as well.

Those that are “amoral” may – or may not – have that same level of importance. Nevertheless, they *are* uniquely personal and, for that reason, can have a significant effect upon an individual's life. This is especially true for his or her “major decisions.”

What type of career should I pursue?
Which school should I attend?
Is it God's will for me to marry?
If so, should I marry Martha or Sarah? / Should I marry Bill or Jack?
Should I be a stay-at-home Mom or pursue a career?
Should I start my own business or work for Jim?
Should we buy the house on Maple Street or rent the one on Elm?

When a believer faces these kinds of decisions, his desire for God's help often becomes more intense. His prayer life becomes more focused. And his search for divine guidance, more deliberate. Naturally, he wants what is best for his life.

But unlike God's moral will (clearly made known in the Scriptures), God's guidance regarding these amoral issues is not quite so precise. (Nowhere is there a verse in the Bible that reads, “*Robert, I want you to be a plumber*” or “*Elizabeth, I want you to marry Jack*.”) How, then, does the believer know what course of action he or she is to pursue?

HOW CAN I KNOW THIS ASPECT OF GOD'S WILL FOR MY LIFE?

The answer to this question is to pursue God's guidance as presented in the form of *wise principles*. Applying these principles to one's unique situation (such as his abilities, interests, personality, temperament, circumstances, resources, education) will lead him to make the most of his life in the area for which he is best suited. As with the moral will of God, a believer's understanding of what God wants him to do will increase as his knowledge of God's Word increases. It is the way of wisdom.

The Way of Wisdom

HOW BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO FINDS WISDOM AND THE MAN WHO GAINS UNDERSTANDING. FOR HER PROFIT IS BETTER THAN THE PROFIT OF SILVER AND HER GAIN BETTER THAN FINE GOLD. SHE IS MORE PRECIOUS THAN JEWELS; AND NOTHING YOU DESIRE COMPARES WITH HER. LONG LIFE IS IN HER RIGHT HAND; IN HER LEFT HAND ARE RICHES AND HONOR. HER WAYS ARE PLEASANT WAYS AND ALL HER PATHS ARE PEACE. SHE IS A TREE OF LIFE TO THOSE WHO TAKE HOLD OF HER, AND HAPPY ARE ALL WHO HOLD HER FAST.
(PROVERBS 3:13-18)

Without exception, to follow the will of God is to follow “*the way of wisdom*.” We have already seen this to be true when one submits to His *moral will*. God has designed those choices that are pure (holy) and upright (righteous) to produce a wholesome life ... one that is stable, secure, and useful ... a life with purpose, sound in judgment, and governed by discernment.

This is also true when someone is facing a personal decision and wants to make the best choice possible. If he submits himself to God’s principles of wisdom, the choices he makes will prove to be the right ones. If he were to make this his practice throughout life, every area of his life would approach its fullest potential: spiritually, psychologically, mentally, emotionally, socially, physically, financially, materially.

In the process, he would present to the world an undeniable testimony that the one true God, the God of the Bible, knows exactly what He is doing.

100 % of God’s Wise Principles Has Been Revealed

The Bible reveals *all* God’s counsel to guide the believer in the decisions of life. Every principle he needs to make the most of his life is available in God’s Word:

guidance for selecting a career,
for choosing a spouse,
for a healthy marriage,
for raising children,
for handling finances,
concerning business practices,
concerning real estate development,
concerning labor relations,
for good citizenship,
for dealing with terminal illness ... and so forth.

Let us be assured. God is not silent. His counsel is not hidden. It is available to all who are willing to look for it and listen. If the believer can read (or is in the company of someone who can read to him) and if he owns a copy of the Scriptures (or knows someone who does), the wisdom of God is ever-present!

WISDOM SHOUTS IN THE STREET; SHE LIFTS HER VOICE IN THE SQUARE. AT THE HEAD OF THE NOISY STREETS SHE CRIES OUT; AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE GATES IN THE CITY SHE UTTERS HER SAYINGS: ... HE WHO LISTENS TO ME (WISDOM) SHALL LIVE SECURELY AND WILL BE AT EASE FROM THE DREAD OF EVIL. (PROVERBS 1:20-21, 33, PARENTHESIS ADDED)

Our heavenly Father has not left us in the dark when it comes to knowing *how to live wisely*. If we are confused over a situation we face, it is not because the Bible is silent on the issue. It is because we do not yet have a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures.

What We Are Trusting God to Do Concerning His Principles of Wisdom

From 1st John 5:14-15 we learn how to pray with expectation:

THIS IS THE CONFIDENCE WHICH WE HAVE BEFORE HIM, THAT, IF WE ASK ANYTHING ACCORDING TO HIS WILL, HE HEARS US. AND IF WE KNOW THAT HE HEARS US IN WHATEVER WE ASK, WE KNOW THAT WE HAVE THE REQUESTS WHICH WE HAVE ASKED FROM HIM. (1ST JOHN 5:14-15)

But since the specific *content* of God's will for our personal lives is not revealed, what exactly are we supposed to trust God to do?

USING THE LEVEL OF FAITH WE HAVE,
(WHETHER A SMALL AMOUNT ... A GREAT AMOUNT ... OR SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN)

WE ARE TO TRUST GOD

¹ TO BE TRUE TO HIS UNCHANGING CHARACTER,

² TO KEEP HIS ASSURED PROMISES,

³ TO FULFILL HIS UNFAILING PROPHECIES,

AND

TO PROVIDE US WITH HIS WISDOM, HIS MOTIVATION, AND HIS POWER

⁴ TO STRENGTHEN HIS CHURCH,

⁵ TO OBEY HIS MORAL LAWS,

AND

⁶ TO APPLY HIS WISE PRINCIPLES.

God's "principles of wisdom," found in His Word, also contribute to the *content* of our faith. As we strive to apply them to the decisions we face, we can rest with assurance that our loving Father will do *what is best* according to His infinite wisdom and perfect timing.

This, too, is – in part – what it means for the just to live by faith.

Our goal now is to become oriented to some practical steps we should apply *when we do not know what to do*.

WHAT TO DO WHEN WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

The one and only true God, the God of the Bible, is sovereign. He reigns over the details of His creation, including your life and mine. But God's Word does not portray the Christian life as a "let go and let God do everything for you" kind of life. Nor does it instruct us to "do what you can and hope for the best." Rather than being one-sided, the Christian life is a *balanced life* between *trusting God* and *living responsibly (under His guidance and power)*.

But what does "living responsibly" look like when we are not sure whether we should turn right or left, stop or keep moving, go straight or turn around, go up the hill or down the hill? Is there anything we should be doing when we do not know what to do?

(1) Humbly submit to God's will in advance

To live wisely is to live deliberately. (A wise life does not just ... happen.) This kind of life – one that is deliberate – demands a certain resolve. Right up front, *long before* people and / or circumstances tempt us to do otherwise, we must make a commitment to follow the wisdom of God ... no matter what happens. To have this resolve *must* be the first step we take ... and here's why.

To base your decisions on the wisdom of God is not always the easiest thing to do; nor is it always the most convenient. We should be ready for that. Following God's way of doing things will most certainly grate against the worldly minds around us. While everyone else is "swimming *with* the current" (as they follow the world's wisdom), you and I will feel like spiritual salmon, swimming upstream *against* the current (as we follow God's wisdom). At this point, pressure to compromise our convictions will begin to come at us from within (in the form of doubts and fears) and from without (in the form of criticism from others). All this will test the degree of faithfulness we have to our Lord and to His Word.

Dear friends, that is *not* the time to *decide* whether you will live according to God's wisdom or not.

Those who want to follow His wisdom will eventually face many pressures to abandon their values. It will be far easier to *keep* our decision to follow the ways of God if that commitment has already been made, rather than trying to *create* that kind of resolution "on the spot."

JESUS SAID TO THEM, "MY FOOD IS TO DO THE WILL OF HIM WHO SENT ME AND TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WORK." (JOHN 4:34)

(2) Do not be hasty in your decision

If we have a decision to make, and we have seven days to do so, we should not make our decision in two days. Or three. Or four. We should determine by when we *must* have an answer (that is, we should identify the deadline), then take that *entire time* to pray and think through the issue. Instead of rushing to a conclusion, we need to allow time for other factors to surface – other “pros and cons” – that could change the direction we would have taken ... those that may not come to mind until day five or day six.

HE WHO MAKES HASTE WITH HIS FEET ERRS. (PROVERB 19:2B)

(3) Bathe your search in prayer

It would be nice if this section, “Bathe your search in prayer,” could be introduced with the words “This goes without saying” But it cannot. This appeal for prayer *must* be clear and it must be direct because we often take this step as a last resort. Perhaps more times than we would like to admit, we turn to God only after our own best efforts have failed and we have exhausted all our options.

Surely, we know by now that life runs more smoothly when we make prayer a priority. This would most certainly hold true as we navigate our way through life’s many decisions. When we pray for God’s wisdom and guidance up front – as well as throughout the process – we are turning to the One Who will prevent us from *creating* a mess. He is, after all, our “wonderful Counselor” (Isaiah 9:6).

(4) Search for God’s wisdom from the Scriptures

The Word of God contains every principle we need to make wise decisions.

For example, if we are thinking about starting our own business, the Scriptures can guide us in the areas of financial investment, the selection of a business partner, the acquisition of debt, employer / employee relations, and the Christian’s work ethic.

Let us, therefore, seek the counsel God’s Word offers regarding the issues we face.

O, HOW I LOVE YOUR LAW! IT IS MY MEDITATION ALL THE DAY. YOUR COMMANDMENTS MAKE ME WISER THAN MY ENEMIES, FOR THEY ARE EVER MINE. I HAVE MORE INSIGHT THAN ALL MY TEACHERS, FOR YOUR TESTIMONIES ARE MY MEDITATION. I UNDERSTAND MORE THAN THE AGED, BECAUSE I HAVE OBSERVED YOUR PRECEPTS. (PSALM 119:97-100)

(5) Seek guidance from counselors

We should ask advice from those who

- * have *Biblical discernment*: godly men and women who can guide us through the decision with purity and uprightness

Whether by our own study or by someone else's (preachers, counselors, Sunday School teachers, et. al.), there is one way – and there is only one way – we can be certain that we are following God's will for our lives. If possible, seek sound advice from more than one counselor who is steeped in the Scriptures. Together, you and they should seek God's counsel as found in the Scriptures.

Furthermore, we should select counselors who

- * have *knowledge*: they have understanding in the area of our concern
- * have *experience*: they "have been through this decision before"
- * are *secure*: because they are healthy in their own self-esteem, they will not hold us in contempt
- * are *trustworthy*: they can be trusted to keep personal information confidential
- * are *truthful*: they will tell us what we *need* to hear, not what we *want* to hear

It may be that those we consult suggest options we may not have considered. Before we can make the *best* choice, we must first know *all* the options!

WHERE THERE IS NO GUIDANCE, THE PEOPLE FALL; BUT IN ABUNDANCE OF COUNSELORS, THERE IS VICTORY.
(PROVERB 11:14)

... WITH THOSE WHO RECEIVE COUNSEL IS WISDOM. (PROVERB 13:10B)

WITHOUT CONSULTATION, PLANS ARE FRUSTRATED; BUT WITH MANY COUNSELORS THEY SUCCEED.
(PROVERB 15:22)

(6) In view of your personal situation, decide which option is best for you

The one making the decision should list the "pros and cons" of each option in view of his personal situation. *"In light of my abilities, my resources, my strengths, my education, my time, my circumstances, and my desires, which option seems to be the best?"*

OR WHAT KING, WHEN HE SETS OUT TO MEET ANOTHER KING IN BATTLE, WILL NOT FIRST SIT DOWN AND TAKE COUNSEL WHETHER HE IS STRONG ENOUGH WITH TEN THOUSAND MEN TO ENCOUNTER THE ONE COMING AGAINST HIM WITH TWENTY THOUSAND? OR ELSE, WHILE THE OTHER IS STILL FAR AWAY, HE SENDS A DELEGATION AND ASKS TERMS OF PEACE. (LUKE 14:31-32)

Once we have done our research, it would be wise – if possible – to set the decision aside for a time. Further insights may come.

**(7) Ask yourself the question,
“Which of these options, if any, do I *want* to do?”**

God often leads His people by means of their interests and desires. What do we *want* to do? For what do we have a *passion*? Whatever that is, we should present our desire to God, held upon an opened palm (“*Your* will be done”), not within a clenched fist (“*My* will be done”).

PAUL WANTED THIS MAN (TIMOTHY) TO GO WITH HIM. (ACTS 16:3)

(8) Make the decision, then take steps to accomplish it

Seeking to discover God’s best for our lives often involves both planning and acting. It requires us to plan our work and then work our plan.

PAUL WANTED THIS MAN (TIMOTHY) TO GO WITH HIM. AND HE TOOK HIM AND CIRCUMCISED HIM BECAUSE OF THE JEWS WHO WERE IN THOSE PARTS, FOR THEY ALL KNEW THAT HIS FATHER WAS A GREEK. (ACTS 16:3)

(9) While waiting, make the most of where you are and what you have

Once we have done everything we know to do, and there is nothing more we *can* do in our pursuit of God’s will, we should not waste our time or resources. We still have plenty of responsibilities before us, and they should not be neglected. We should be

conscientious in our pursuit of Christ’s fellowship,
active in serving Christ,
diligent in obedience,
and attentive to our personal duties.

If this is how we “wait on the Lord,” our lives will not suffer from paralysis, impatience, or anxiety. We will not feel as though we are wasting our priceless assets of time and strength.

THEREFORE, BE CAREFUL HOW YOU WALK, NOT AS UNWISE MEN BUT AS WISE, MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR TIME, BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL. (EPHESIANS 5:15-16)

Conclusion

God's guidance of our lives involves *trusting God* and *living responsibly*. We are to

- 1) humbly submit to God's will in advance
- 2) not be hasty in our decision
- 3) bathe our search in prayer
- 4) search for God's wisdom from the Scriptures
- 5) seek guidance from counselors
- 6) decide which option is best for us in view of our personal situation
- 7) ask ourselves the question, "Which of these options, if any, do we *want* to do?"
- 8) make the decision, then take steps to accomplish it
- 9) while waiting, make the most of where we are and what we have

WHAT NOT TO DO WHEN WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

The pursuit to know God's will has led many well-intentioned believers to display some rather foolish behavior. The sincerity of their faith and their passion for Christ is not necessarily in question. Rather, the problem is in the steps they use to receive God's guidance, steps that lead them to *expect a dramatic miracle* (and if they do not experience one, they think something is wrong).

Do Not Expect Various Miracles of Communication

There are those who want – and expect – God to communicate with them as He did with the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles.

Perhaps through *"the still, small voice of God."* This is, after all, how God spoke to Elijah while hiding from the wicked queen Jezebel.

Or by the *handwriting on a wall*. The Lord used this means on one occasion to communicate with a Chaldean king, a message the prophet Daniel had to interpret.

Or through *angelic visitations*. This is how the virgin Mary received instructions regarding the birth of the Messiah.

Or through *visions and dreams*. This is how Joseph learned of his and Mary's calling, and how God guided him to flee from Herod the Great's attempted assassination of the infant Jesus.

There is, however, something about such incidents as these that often escapes our notice. When Moses heard God's voice coming from a burning bush, he was surprised! He was not expecting it. Nor was Belshazzar expecting the fingers of a man's hand to write on the wall of his palace. In fact, it scared him. When the angel of the Lord appeared to Zacharias, "fear gripped him." And when the angel Gabriel walked into the room to announce Christ's birth to the virgin Mary, she was "perplexed." In other words, none of these people were *expecting* God to communicate with them in these ways.

Yet, many in the Christian community seem to think that it is *normal* for God to communicate with His people through such miracles (in particular, by His "still, small voice"). Indeed, they look for them to happen on a regular basis. But the fact is, the Biblical record presents these miracles of communication as being infrequent and quite unusual.

Does God use miracles to communicate with man today? More than likely, yes. But we would suggest that these *legitimate* miracles of communication most often occur *where copies of*

God's Word are not accessible (for example, where Communist or militant Islamic governments have outlawed Christianity).

Assuming, then, that a copy of God's Word *is* available, we make the following assertion:

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO KNOW GOD'S WILL WITHOUT KNOWING GOD'S WORD

Let us not look for the will of God in the wrong places. Let us look in the right place, the Scriptures.

Do Not Put Out a Fleece

THEN GIDEON SAID TO GOD, "IF YOU WILL DELIVER ISRAEL THROUGH ME, AS YOU HAVE SPOKEN, BEHOLD, I WILL PUT A FLEECE OF WOOL ON THE THRESHING FLOOR. IF THERE IS DEW ON THE FLEECE ONLY, AND IT IS DRY ON ALL THE GROUND, THEN I WILL KNOW THAT YOU WILL DELIVER ISRAEL THROUGH ME, AS YOU HAVE SPOKEN." AND IT WAS SO. WHEN HE AROSE EARLY THE NEXT MORNING AND SQUEEZED THE FLEECE, HE DRAINED THE DEW FROM THE FLEECE, A BOWL FULL OF WATER. THEN GIDEON SAID TO GOD, "DO NOT LET YOUR ANGER BURN AGAINST ME THAT I MAY SPEAK ONCE MORE; PLEASE LET ME MAKE A TEST ONCE MORE WITH THE FLEECE, LET IT NOW BE DRY ONLY ON THE FLEECE, AND LET THERE BE DEW ON ALL THE GROUND." GOD DID SO THAT NIGHT; FOR IT WAS DRY ONLY ON THE FLEECE, AND DEW WAS ON ALL THE GROUND. (JUDGES 6:36-40)

Often, the reason we use this "fleece test" is because we face a decision that has two or more options ... we do not know which option to choose ... so we use some type of "fleece" to *determine* the choice God wants us to make. What we are, in fact, doing is using this fleece to make the decision for us. It is equivalent to "flipping a coin."

Or we may use a fleece to provide us with proof that *God* is the One giving us the guidance we *think* He is giving us ... but we are not entirely sure. So, we ask for a sign of confirmation.

But according to *Judges 6*, Gideon did not use a fleece for either of these purposes. He was not trying to decide between two options; nor was he making sure that God was, indeed, directing his steps. Carefully read again the words of his prayer:

"IF YOU WILL DELIVER ISRAEL THROUGH ME, AS YOU HAVE SPOKEN, BEHOLD, I WILL PUT A FLEECE OF WOOL ON THE THRESHING FLOOR. IF THERE IS DEW ON THE FLEECE ONLY, AND IT IS DRY ON ALL THE GROUND, THEN I WILL KNOW THAT YOU WILL DELIVER ISRAEL THROUGH ME, AS YOU HAVE SPOKEN." (JUDGES 6:36-40)

Gideon *knew the course* God wanted him to take: "You will deliver Israel through me." (He said that twice.) And he *knew that God Himself* had called him to do so: "as *You* have spoken." (He said that twice, too.) Apparently, Gideon needed proof that God would keep His Word by using *him* to do so. He seemed skeptical that God would (or could) use such an insignificant person as himself to accomplish so great a task. After all, he was the youngest member of a minor family. Gideon was the least of the least.

O LORD, HOW SHALL I DELIVER ISRAEL? BEHOLD, MY FAMILY IS THE LEAST IN MANASSEH, AND I AM THE YOUNGEST IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE." (JUDGES 6:15)

In asking God for this sign, Gideon wavered in his faith toward God's *ability* to use such a small person to do such a big job. At this point in his life, Gideon was not a man of faith. His use of a fleece was an act of doubt toward God's revealed will. His actions are not a model for us to imitate! ²⁰

But If You Insist on Following Gideon's Example ...

Most of our "fleeces" are not like Gideon's. The two signs for which Gideon asked God were *miraculous*: for the dew to saturate the fleece without any falling upon the ground, then for the dew to cover the ground but the fleece remain dry. Our fleeces, however, tend to be *circumstantial* rather than supernatural:

"If I put my car up for sale, and it sells, that means God wants me to put down a deposit on a new house."

There is nothing supernatural about selling a car. That happens thousands of times every day, both for believers and for unbelievers. With this approach, one is using his circumstances – rather than God's wisdom – to determine the direction he should take.

It is true that a person's circumstances should *influence* his decision; but they should never *make* the decision for him. That is a foolish strategy to use in making life's decisions. However, if you insist upon following Gideon's example, then follow it *fully*. Ask for a *supernatural* sign:

"Lord, it is July, and it is 96 degrees outside. If snow covers my car by 2:00 this afternoon, then I will take that to mean You want me to be a carpenter instead of a car mechanic."

²⁰ "Gideon's two requests for signs in the fleece should be viewed as *weak faith*. Even Gideon recognized this when he said, 'Do not let Your anger burn against me' (vs. 39) since God had already specifically promised His Presence and victory (vv. 12, 14, 16). But they were also legitimate requests for confirmation of victory against seemingly impossible odds (6:5; 7:2, 12). God nowhere reprimanded Gideon but was very compassionate in giving what his inadequacy requested. In 7:10-15 God volunteered a sign to boost Gideon's faith. He should have believed God's promise in 7:9 but needed bolstering; so, God graciously gave it without chastisement." (*The MacArthur Study Bible*, MacArthur, John, footnote: Judges 6:36-40, page 486).

This, of course, sounds ridiculous; but that *is* what Gideon did. And he did so because his faith was weak, not because his faith was strong. Dear friends, we should not use a “fleece” to determine what God wants us to do. Instead, let God’s principles of wisdom, revealed throughout the pages of Scripture, guide us.

**Do Not View a Sense of Immediate Peace
as a Confirmation of God’s Will**

“I FEEL AT PEACE WITH THIS DECISION. THEREFORE, IT MUST BE GOD’S WILL.”

A believer’s sense of serenity is not necessarily a “thumbs up” from God that he is in His will.

One can easily “feel at peace” over a choice he has made because that was what he *wanted* to do in the first place (rather than taking the course he *should* have taken). Our desires are not always wise.

Nor are they always moral. “Caving in” to temptation (saying “Yes” to sin) is often the easiest (most peaceful) road to take. But it is not the best. Seeking to satisfy the cravings of one’s flesh rather than keeping one’s resolve to remain faithful to God can lead to disaster. Only the will of God can bring *lasting* peace.

Or to look at this from a different angle, when one *obeys the will of God*, he often must set his own will aside. This is not an easy thing to do. Dying to self often results in experiencing the *anguish* of personal loss.

Consider, for example, what Jesus endured while in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of His betrayal. He knew that His submission to the will of God would involve the pain of facing a Roman cross and the agony of being forsaken by His Father. We can be sure there was nothing peaceful about these hours as He bowed before God on the garden floor.

AND BEING IN AGONY HE WAS PRAYING VERY FERVENTLY; AND HIS SWEAT BECAME LIKE DROPS OF BLOOD, FALLING DOWN UPON THE GROUND. (LUKE 22:44)

Dear friends, a sense of peace does not prove that one is in the will of God.

Conclusion

When we face a decision and do not know what to do, there are steps we can take that will help guide us toward God’s best for our lives. But there are other practices, foolish but often used, from which we would do well to steer clear.

- 1) Although God can use miracles to communicate to man (and likely does when His Word is not accessible), this is not His usual means of guidance.
- 2) Furthermore, Gideon's use of a fleece was an act of weak faith and, therefore, is not a model for the believer to imitate.
- 3) And lastly, one's sense of immediate peace does not confirm that he is in God's will.

HOW TO STRENGTHEN OUR FAITH IN GOD

We said earlier that moving a mountain (receiving the answer “Yes” to our prayers) does not require great faith. Moving a mountain requires only *a small amount of faith* – a “mustard seed” amount – *in a great God.*” (This, of course, assumes that it is His will to move the mountain.)

This, however, does not mean that a weak faith is pleasing to Him. To the contrary, the Lord wants His people to grow *strong* in their faith. So, how does one strengthen his faith in God? He does so by spending time with Him. As with any other relationship, the more exposure we have to someone, the better we know his character.

*LIKewise, THE BETTER WE KNOW THE CHARACTER OF OUR GOD,
THE STRONGER WILL BE OUR ABILITY TO TRUST HIM.*

What, then, can we do to focus on the character of our God?

BY READING (HEARING) HIS WORD

and

BY REMEMBERING HIS WORKS

By Reading (Hearing) the Word of God

Studying the Scriptures is essential to our growth in faith.

SO, FAITH COMES FROM HEARING, AND HEARING BY THE WORD OF CHRIST. (ROMANS 10:17)

The better we know the Scriptures, the better we will know God (the *Object* of our faith) and the better we will know His will (the *content* of our faith).

God, the Object of Our Faith

The Bible reveals *the character and works of God* in an interesting way. If you have ever read a book on theology, you may have noticed a significant difference between its presentation of God and the way the Bible presents Him. A book on theology looks something like this:

God is like this ... and He is like this ... and He is like this.

God has done this ... and He has done this ... and He has done this. ²¹

The Bible, however, does not present God as though it were reporting on a laboratory experiment. The God of heaven and earth is revealed to us within the context of human history and experience. Truly, the Scriptures are saturated with the lives and testimonies of men and women who have received the blessings and protection and provision and discipline of their great God.

What lends tremendous credibility to these testimonies is the utter humanity of these “heroes of the faith.” How slow they were to learn. How scared some of them were. Sometimes compromising. Sometimes hesitant to act. And how patient God was in turning these feeble men and women into giants of faith. We may not be able to relate to the way some missionaries are portrayed in modern biographies; but we can surely relate to Moses as we watch him drag his feet to answer God’s call in front of the burning bush ... or Abraham stretching the truth about Sarah his wife in order to save his own neck ... or Peter’s bold promise to remain true to Christ (while sitting with his friends in an upper room), only to deny knowing Him a short time later (while sitting with his enemies around a firepit).

These very human people are our “heroes of the faith.” But they did not start out that way anymore than we have. These accounts – not to their own faithfulness and strength, but to God’s – are meant to strengthen us in our faith.

The life of our Savior is also a source of faith, but in a unique way. From the Word of God, we are inspired to live by His resurrection power in our everyday lives. Additionally, the Scriptures challenge us to follow His *perfect* example of gut-wrenching endurance in the face of opposition as we share in the fellowship of His sufferings.

A study of God’s character and abilities, revealed through the lives of those who either stumbled alongside Him or walked boldly with Him, will do much to cultivate our own faith. We will discover that the better we *know* the *Object* of our faith, the better we are able to trust Him to *do* the *content* of our faith (His will).

God’s Will, the Content of Our Faith

THIS IS THE CONFIDENCE WHICH WE HAVE BEFORE HIM, THAT, IF WE ASK ANYTHING ACCORDING TO HIS WILL, HE HEARS US. AND IF WE KNOW THAT HE HEARS US IN WHATEVER WE ASK, WE KNOW THAT WE HAVE THE REQUESTS WHICH WE HAVE ASKED FROM HIM. (1ST JOHN 5:14-15)

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There is nothing wrong with this type of study if one’s goal is to acquire a thorough and organized understanding of theology. Indeed, the study of doctrine helps the preacher *understand* the whole of Scripture regarding a certain subject, allowing Him to help others understand that subject. Nevertheless, a preacher’s *presentation* of God’s Truth to God’s people should be clothed in the context of *their* lives.

Through our study of the Scriptures, we can discover the will of God. This is the *content* of our faith. Growing in the knowledge of His will, we discover what we can trust Him to *do*. This, too, strengthens us in our faith.

We can pray – with confidence – if we know that what we are asking of God is what *He* wants us to have.

We can know – with confidence – what *He* expects of us as we become familiar with His moral will and wise principles. We are not left groping in the dark, wondering how best to live life. He has told us how in His Word.

We can know – with confidence – what we can have now or what we will have in the future as we discover *His* revealed promises. Especially during tough times, these assurances will encourage us, sustain us, strengthen us, and comfort us.

By Remembering the Works of God

In the Old Testament the Spirit of God – through His prophets – urged the Jewish people to remember God's past works in their nation's history. As each generation faced its own trials, they were to recall how God faithfully dealt with their ancestors during previous similar trials.

Israel was to *remember* their redemption from Egyptian bondage. [*Trust Him to **deliver** you from all forms of bondage.*]

MOSES SAID TO THE PEOPLE, "REMEMBER THIS DAY IN WHICH YOU WENT OUT FROM EGYPT, FROM THE HOUSE OF SLAVERY; FOR BY A POWERFUL HAND THE LORD BROUGHT YOU OUT FROM THIS PLACE. (EXODUS 13:3)

They were to *remember* what God did to the nation of Egypt and its leadership that they might have courage to face other political and military adversaries. [*Trust Him to **defeat** those who oppose you as you seek to do His will.*]

"IF YOU SHOULD SAY IN YOUR HEART, 'THESE NATIONS ARE GREATER THAN I; HOW CAN I DISPOSSESS THEM?' YOU SHALL NOT BE AFRAID OF THEM; YOU SHALL WELL REMEMBER WHAT THE LORD YOUR GOD DID TO PHARAOH AND TO ALL EGYPT." (DEUTERONOMY 7:17-18)

They were to *remember* God's dealings with them as they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. This would not only increase their faith in Yahweh's loving care for them but would also serve to deter them from unbelief and disobedience as they face new trials. [*Trust Him to **provide** for and **purify** you.*]

"YOU SHALL REMEMBER ALL THE WAY WHICH THE LORD YOUR GOD HAS LED YOU IN THE WILDERNESS THESE FORTY YEARS, THAT HE MIGHT HUMBLE YOU, TESTING YOU, TO KNOW WHAT WAS IN YOUR HEART, WHETHER YOU WOULD KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS OR NOT. (Deuteronomy 8:2)

They were to *remember* the days of "Purim" that they might never doubt Yahweh's protection of His people from genocide. [*Trust Him to **protect** you.*]

... THE JEWS ESTABLISHED AND MADE A CUSTOM FOR THEMSELVES AND FOR THEIR DESCENDANTS ... SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT FAIL TO CELEBRATE THESE TWO DAYS ACCORDING TO THEIR REGULATION AND ACCORDING TO THEIR APPOINTED TIME ANNUALLY. SO THESE DAYS WERE TO BE REMEMBERED AND CELEBRATED THROUGHOUT EVERY GENERATION, EVERY FAMILY, EVERY PROVINCE AND EVERY CITY; AND THESE DAYS OF PURIM WERE NOT TO FAIL FROM AMONG THE JEWS, OR THEIR MEMORY FADE FROM THEIR DESCENDANTS. (ESTHER 9:27-28)

During the Church Age, this exhortation for believing Jews to remember God's past works continued. When unbelieving Jews pressured them to return to Judaism, the author of Hebrews exhorted them to

... REMEMBER THE FORMER DAYS, WHEN, AFTER BEING ENLIGHTENED, YOU ENDURED A GREAT CONFLICT OF SUFFERINGS, PARTLY BY BEING MADE A PUBLIC SPECTACLE THROUGH REPROACHES AND TRIBULATIONS, AND PARTLY BY BECOMING SHARERS WITH THOSE WHO WERE SO TREATED. (HEBREWS 10:32-33)

This was to strengthen them in confidence and endurance during their present trial. [*Trust Him to **strengthen** and **sustain** you as you face pressures and assaults from the world.*]

Therefore, let us also

REMEMBER GOD'S PAST WORKS

The works that we are to remember, however, should include more than what the Lord did for Israel as recorded in the Bible. We should remember the times *we ourselves* have been the recipients of His loving care ... what *our* Shepherd did for *us* in a hospital room ... or in an unemployment line ... or at a funeral home ... or in the life of our family ... or in any of the scores of trials we have faced.

Is not our God an unchanging God? Has He not *always* taken care of *us* in the past? Why, then, would we fear that He will abandon us in the present? The longer we are the objects of His favor, the more we should trust Him to deal with us in lovingkindness. By remembering the times that He has proven Himself to us, we can grow in our belief of this bedrock fact:

OUR GOD CAN BE TRUSTED

WHAT IT MEANS TO “LIVE BY FAITH”

AS IT IS WRITTEN, “... THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.” (ROMANS 1:17)

USING THE LEVEL OF FAITH WE HAVE,
(WHETHER A SMALL AMOUNT ... A GREAT AMOUNT ... OR SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN)

WE ARE TO TRUST GOD

¹ TO BE TRUE TO HIS UNCHANGING CHARACTER,

² TO KEEP HIS ASSURED PROMISES,

³ TO FULFILL HIS UNFAILING PROPHECIES,

AND

TO PROVIDE US WITH HIS WISDOM, HIS MOTIVATION, AND HIS POWER

⁴ TO STRENGTHEN HIS CHURCH,

⁵ TO OBEY HIS MORAL LAWS,

AND

⁶ TO APPLY HIS WISE PRINCIPLES.

Beloved stewards of God’s Truth, *this* is what it means for the just to live by faith.

Something Worth Noting

Imagine, if you will, what each of our days would be like if we were to live that kind of life ... consistently ... throughout the day ... every day of our lives. This *pursuit* of the faith-life *is* what our heavenly Father expects of us, His children. It is to be our great and serious business.

*MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.
AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM.
(HEBREWS 10:38)*

To be sure, the faith-life is a noble life. But it is also a tall order. For faith to become a consistent trait of our lives, *persistent prayer* must be woven into its fabric. (No Christian is greater than his prayer life.)

Furthermore, there is nothing *natural* about this kind of life. Faith allows believers to participate with a supernatural Person as *He* fulfills His perfect will. This in turn allows us to go through the common situations we face every day of our lives with a sense of wonder and amazement.

Through faith we are given

God's wisdom to respond to the various decisions before us, no matter how small or how big,

God's power to minister to others,

God's perseverance to respond to the everyday trials of life,

God's composure to respond to the world's persecutions,

God's purity & righteousness to respond to the various temptations we face,

and *God's protection* to respond to the assaults and oppressions of spiritual warfare.

Just think, as we trust God to be true to His unchanging character and to do His perfect will, the Almighty gives us a front row seat to watch Him perform miracle after miracle. And to do so in the context of our normal, everyday routine! Thus, an ordinary life becomes something quite extraordinary as the wondrous gradually becomes our norm.

APPENDIX A

***GOD'S ASSURED PROMISES TO THE
NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH***

The following is not a complete list of God's promises. Its purpose is to give us a sample of what God plans to do on behalf of His Name, His beloved people, and the world in general.

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GOD'S ASSURED PROMISES TO THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

GOD IS NOT A MAN THAT HE SHOULD LIE, NOR A SON OF MAN THAT HE SHOULD REPENT. HAS HE SAID, AND WILL HE NOT DO IT? OR HAS HE SPOKEN, AND WILL HE NOT MAKE IT GOOD? (NUMBERS 23:19)

I. ABOUT THE WORD OF GOD

A. Its Character

1) The endurance of God's Word (and, therefore, its authority and life-giving benefits) is eternal

*... THE TRUTH ... ABIDES IN US AND WILL BE WITH US FOREVER. (2ND JOHN 1:2)*¹

[*"the Truth ... will be with us forever."* God's Word will never come to an end. It will never be invalidated, altered, or destroyed. Truth is eternally secure. The believer will never wake up one day and wonder if yesterday's truth is still valid. Its enduring presence, trustworthiness, and wholesome authority is certain.]

2) The endurance of the Son of God's Words (and, therefore, its authority and life-giving benefits) is eternal

*HEAVEN AND EARTH WILL PASS AWAY, BUT MY WORDS WILL NOT PASS AWAY. (MARK 13:31)*²

[*"My words will not pass away."* Christ's words will never come to an end. Because He is God, His words will never be invalidated, altered, or destroyed. His Truth is eternally secure. Its enduring presence, trustworthiness, and wholesome authority is certain.]

B. Its Effect Upon a Believing Heart

"The truth of God, like a good medicine, will continue to heal sin-sick souls so long as people receive it by faith." The Bible Knowledge Commentary, NT, Constable, Thomas L., 1st Thessalonians, page 687.

3) By his faith in the Word of God, the believer can experience the fullness of Christ

*FOR THIS REASON, WE ALSO CONSTANTLY THANK GOD THAT WHEN YOU RECEIVED THE WORD OF GOD WHICH YOU HEARD FROM US, YOU ACCEPTED IT NOT AS THE WORD OF MEN, BUT FOR WHAT IT REALLY IS, THE WORD OF GOD, WHICH ALSO PERFORMS ITS WORK IN YOU WHO BELIEVE. (1ST THESSALONIANS 2:13)*³

[“*performs its work in you who believe.*” The Word of God’s “work” includes Its ability to ¹ *save* (Romans 10:17; 1st Peter 1:23), ² *teach* and ³ *train* (2nd Timothy 3:16-17), ⁴ *guide* (Psalm 119:105), ⁵ *counsel* (Psalm 119:24), ⁶ *revive* (Psalm 119:154), ⁷ *restore* (Psalm 19:7), ⁸ *warn* and ⁹ *reward* (Psalm 19:11), ¹⁰ *nourish* (1st Peter 2:2), ¹¹ *judge* (Hebrews 4:12), ¹² *sanctify* (John 17:17), ¹³ *free* (John 8:31-32), ¹⁴ *enrich* (Colossians 3:16), ¹⁵ *protect* (Psalm 119:11), ¹⁶ *strengthen* (Psalm 119:28), ¹⁷ *make wise* (Psalm 119:97-100), ¹⁸ *rejoice the heart* (Psalm 19:8), and ¹⁹ *prosper* (Joshua 1:8-9). Taken from the *MacArthur Study Bible*, MacArthur, John, footnote: 1st Thessalonians 2:13]

4) A steady “diet and exercise” of God’s Word will produce wholesome spiritual growth

*THEREFORE, PUTTING ASIDE ALL MALICE AND ALL DECEIT AND HYPOCRISY AND ENVY AND ALL SLANDER, LIKE NEWBORN BABIES, LONG FOR THE PURE MILK OF THE WORD, SO THAT BY IT YOU MAY GROW IN RESPECT TO SALVATION (1ST PETER 2:1-2)*⁴

[A “*putting aside*” of sinful practices, coupled with spiritual nourishment from God’s Word, will produce wholesome spiritual growth.]

5) As the faithful steward of God’s Truth lovingly obeys the commandments of his Lord, Christ will reveal even more of Himself to him

*HE WHO HAS MY COMMANDMENTS AND KEEPS THEM IS THE ONE WHO LOVES ME; AND HE WHO LOVES ME ... (I) WILL DISCLOSE MYSELF TO HIM. (JOHN 14:21)*⁵

[“*I will disclose Myself to him.*” As the believer proves himself – by obedience – to be a loving follower of Christ, Christ will make Himself and His ways more fully known to him.]

6) Obeying the will of Christ will replace confusion, wickedness, and impurity with a clarity of understanding, uprightness, and purity

*THEN JESUS AGAIN SPOKE TO THEM, SAYING, “I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD; HE WHO FOLLOWS ME WILL NOT WALK IN THE DARKNESS, BUT WILL HAVE THE LIGHT OF LIFE.” (JOHN 8:12)*⁶

[“*follows Me.*” To follow the Lord Jesus is to *strive* – each day – to whole-heartedly submit one’s will to His will (through faith and obedience). God will deliver those who do from their spiritual blindness into a life of clear understanding.]

*SO, JESUS WAS SAYING TO THOSE JEWS WHO HAD BELIEVED HIM, “IF YOU CONTINUE IN MY WORD, THEN YOU ARE TRULY DISCIPLES OF MINE; AND YOU WILL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH WILL MAKE YOU FREE.” (JOHN 8:31-32)*⁷

[*"If you continue in My Word."* Proof of one's salvation is to persevere in the faith and practice Jesus' teaching.]

[*"you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."* Those who remain steadfast in the Word of God, in faith and practice, will understand divine truth and experience deliverance from their bondage to sin's authority and power.]

*I HAVE COME AS LIGHT INTO THE WORLD, SO THAT EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES IN ME WILL NOT REMAIN IN DARKNESS. (JOHN 12:46)*⁸

[*"everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness."* The one who trusts in Jesus Christ for salvation will be delivered from a life of spiritual insensitivity (a life characterized by demonic deception, rebellion, chaos, confusion, violence) as he, instead, chooses to live according to the "Light" of God's healthy, wholesome Truth (God's Word).]

7) As the believer strives to obey the Word of God, the Spirit of God will increase his motivation and ability to understand, believe, and obey even more

*AND HE WAS SAYING TO THEM, "TAKE CARE WHAT YOU LISTEN TO. BY YOUR STANDARD OF MEASURE, IT WILL BE MEASURED TO YOU; AND MORE WILL BE GIVEN YOU BESIDES. FOR WHOEVER HAS, TO HIM MORE SHALL BE GIVEN" (MARK 4:24-25)*⁹

[*"more shall be given."* This increased motivation and enlarged capacity to understand more of God's Word is the result of a *faithful steward's* resolve to believe and obey the Truth he already knows and practices.]

8) If one disregards or rejects the authority of God's Word over his life, the Spirit of God will gradually decrease his ability to understand it and his motivation to obey it

*AND HE WAS SAYING TO THEM, "TAKE CARE WHAT YOU LISTEN TO. BY YOUR STANDARD OF MEASURE, IT WILL BE MEASURED TO YOU ... FOR ... WHOEVER DOES NOT HAVE, EVEN WHAT HE HAS SHALL BE TAKEN AWAY FROM HIM." (MARK 4:24-25)*¹⁰

[*"what he has shall be taken away from him."* This decrease in understanding and motivation to trust and obey God is the result of one's poor stewardship of the Truth he knows but fails to practice. He becomes "dull of hearing" (Hebrews 5:11).]

II. ABOUT THE CHURCH'S (AND THE WORLD'S) FUTURE

A. The Physical Resurrection

9) God will raise the bodies of believers from the dead

*TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, AN HOUR IS COMING AND NOW IS, WHEN THE DEAD WILL HEAR THE VOICE OF THE SON OF GOD, AND THOSE WHO HEAR WILL LIVE. (JOHN 5:25)*¹¹

[*"the dead."* Those who have died *physically*.]

[*"is coming."* A future, *physical* resurrection awaits those who are born again. Jesus' life-giving power will call them out of their graves. This "resurrection of life" (John 5:29) [also called "the first resurrection" (Revelation 20:6)] will take place at the Return of Christ. Once summoned, the saints "will be caught up together ... in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1st Thessalonians 4:16-17).]

[*"now is."* There is, however, a spiritual resurrection that all true believers have *already* experienced. God has *already* raised believers from the dead (because of their position "in the resurrected Christ") to walk in newness of life (Ephesians 2:5; Colossians 2:13).]

*DO NOT MARVEL AT THIS; FOR AN HOUR IS COMING, IN WHICH ALL WHO ARE IN THE TOMBS WILL HEAR HIS VOICE AND WILL COME FORTH; THOSE WHO DID THE GOOD DEEDS TO A RESURRECTION OF LIFE, THOSE WHO COMMITTED THE EVIL DEEDS TO A RESURRECTION OF JUDGMENT. (JOHN 5:28-29)*¹²

[Salvation is by faith and faith alone, not by faith *plus* works. There are, however, two *kinds* of faith ... and one of them does not save. The faith that does *not* save is a dead faith that produces dead works. The faith that *does* save is a living faith that produces good works.]

[*"good deeds."* With the new birth (at salvation) comes a new nature, a nature that lives a different kind of life. One that seeks to obey Christ. One that produces "good deeds." Those who have this new nature (those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells) are the ones who will hear (the Lord's) voice and will come forth unto a resurrection of life.]"

[*"evil deeds."* Those lacking this new nature do not struggle against their sins. There is no confession of sin, no desire to repent, no effort to pursue Christlikeness. They are spiritually dead. These will be raised from the grave to stand before God in judgment (condemnation).]

*THIS IS THE WILL OF HIM WHO SENT ME, THAT OF ALL THAT HE HAS GIVEN ME I LOSE NOTHING BUT RAISE IT UP ON THE LAST DAY. (JOHN 6:39)*¹³

[*"I lose nothing."* God guarantees the resurrection of every believer because every believer is securely in Christ's possession.]

FOR THIS IS THE WILL OF MY FATHER, THAT EVERYONE WHO BEHOLDS THE SON AND BELIEVES IN HIM WILL HAVE ETERNAL LIFE, AND I MYSELF WILL RAISE HIM UP ON THE LAST DAY. (JOHN 6:40) ¹⁴

[*“For this is the will of My Father,”* to give eternal life to all who believe in His Son. Therefore, the Son of God will raise from the dead those who *believe in Him*.]

NO ONE CAN COME TO ME UNLESS THE FATHER WHO SENT ME DRAWS HIM; AND I WILL RAISE HIM UP ON THE LAST DAY. (JOHN 6:44) ¹⁵

[*“No one can come to Me unless the Father Who sent Me draws him.”* God the Father, not man himself, generates the *will* to trust in Jesus Christ for salvation (John 1:12-13). Furthermore, saving *faith* (to believe the Gospel) is not manufactured by man. Rather, it is “received” from God (2nd Peter 1:1). Once the individual trusts in the resurrected One, God extends to him even more grace, namely, His promise to raise him from the dead.]

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. (JOHN 6:54-55) ¹⁶

[*“eats My flesh and drinks My blood.”* This is not a reference to consuming the physical elements of Communion. (One does not receive eternal life over and over during Communion.) This act of “consuming Christ’s body” is a physical *illustration* of one’s acceptance – by faith – of Christ’s sacrificial death on the Cross.]

[*“has eternal life.”* One’s eternal life does not begin at death. It begins at salvation and continues forever afterwards. The moment one places his faith in the Savior, he receives – that very moment – eternal life, thereby assuring him of his future resurrection.]

JESUS SAID TO HER, “I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE; HE WHO BELIEVES IN ME WILL LIVE EVEN IF HE DIES.” (JOHN 11:25) ¹⁷

[*“will live even if he dies.”* Even though he may die physically, the one who trusts in Jesus Christ for salvation will not die spiritually. God will raise him from the dead unto eternal life.]

AFTER A LITTLE WHILE THE WORLD WILL NO LONGER SEE ME, BUT YOU WILL SEE ME; BECAUSE I LIVE, YOU WILL LIVE ALSO. (JOHN 14:19) ¹⁸

[*“you will see Me.”* The remaining eleven disciples were all eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ. His resurrection is the pledge of *their* resurrection unto life.]

BUT IF THE SPIRIT OF HIM WHO RAISED JESUS FROM THE DEAD DWELLS IN YOU, HE WHO RAISED CHRIST JESUS FROM THE DEAD WILL ALSO GIVE LIFE TO YOUR MORTAL BODIES THROUGH HIS SPIRIT WHO DWELLS IN YOU. (ROMANS 8:11) ¹⁹

[God promises to raise from the dead the mortal bodies of those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells.]

*GOD WHO RAISES THE DEAD ... DELIVERED US FROM SO GREAT A PERIL OF DEATH, AND WILL DELIVER US, HE ON WHOM WE HAVE SET OUR HOPE. AND HE WILL YET DELIVER US. (2ND CORINTHIANS 1:9-10)*²⁰

[“*delivered us from so great a peril of death.*” Based upon the context, we are assured that God will deliver His servants from premature death, that is, until they fulfill their purpose in this life. Later, once they fulfill their purpose, He will deliver them from the grave.]

*HE WHO RAISED THE LORD JESUS WILL RAISE US ALSO WITH JESUS (2ND CORINTHIANS 4:14)*²¹

[“*will raise us also.*” Our confidence that God will deliver us from death is based upon God’s resurrection of Jesus Christ, the First Fruit and Guarantee of resurrection for all who are trusting in Him for this salvation.]

10) God will raise the believer from the dead by His power

*NOW GOD HAS NOT ONLY RAISED THE LORD BUT WILL ALSO RAISE US UP THROUGH HIS POWER. (1ST CORINTHIANS 6:14)*²²

*FOR INDEED HE WAS CRUCIFIED BECAUSE OF WEAKNESS, YET HE LIVES BECAUSE OF THE POWER OF GOD. FOR WE ALSO ARE WEAK IN HIM, YET WE WILL LIVE WITH HIM BECAUSE OF THE POWER OF GOD DIRECTED TOWARD YOU. (2ND CORINTHIANS 13:4)*²³

[“*because of the power of God.*” God’s power was at Christ’s disposal; yet He followed the course of weakness to the cross. Nevertheless, God’s power raised Jesus from the dead. Likewise, we, too (along with the Apostle Paul), are weak. Yet we, too, will be raised from the dead by the power of God, a power that is on display as we minister to others.]

11) God will resurrect the bodies of Church Age believers when Christ returns for them

*FOR AS IN ADAM ALL DIE, SO ALSO IN CHRIST ALL WILL BE MADE ALIVE. BUT EACH IN HIS OWN ORDER: CHRIST THE FIRST FRUITS, AFTER THAT THOSE WHO ARE CHRIST’S AT HIS COMING. (1ST CORINTHIANS 15:22-23)*²⁴

[“*at His coming.*” Christ’s return for His Church is a future event known as the Rapture.]

B. The Rapture

12) A day is approaching when the Lord Jesus will summon Church Age believers unto Himself

*IF I GO AND PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU, I WILL COME AGAIN AND RECEIVE YOU TO MYSELF, THAT WHERE I AM, THERE YOU MAY BE ALSO. (JOHN 14:3)*²⁵

[“a place for you.” Refers to the holy city, the new Jerusalem, where there are “many dwelling places in the Father's house.”]

13) An entire generation of Church Age believers will not die

*BEHOLD, I TELL YOU A MYSTERY; WE WILL NOT ALL SLEEP. (1ST CORINTHIANS 15:51)*²⁶

[The generation of believers alive at the time of the Rapture will not experience death. Instead, “in the twinkling of an eye,” their bodies will be made fit for their eternal home. (Their bodies will “put on” what is imperishable and immortal, 1st Corinthians 15:53.) And they will follow their resurrected brothers and sisters as they ascend to the clouds to meet their Savior.]

14) At the Rapture Christ will deliver believers who are still alive “from the wrath to come”

*(WE) WAIT FOR HIS SON FROM HEAVEN, WHOM HE RAISED FROM THE DEAD, THAT IS JESUS, WHO RESCUES US FROM THE WRATH TO COME. (1ST THESSALONIANS 1:10)*²⁷

[“wrath to come” has both general and specific aspects. Generally speaking, Jesus Christ will deliver *all* believers from every age from the eternal wrath of God (that is, “the Lake of Fire,” Revelation 20:15). Specifically, He will also save *Church Age believers* from the Great Tribulation (a future period of 3½ years that immediately precedes the Second Coming of Christ). During this time, God will pour out His anger upon a world that has rejected His authority and His will, a will that was revealed to them in *His written Word* and through *His Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ*.]

*FOR GOD HAS NOT DESTINED US FOR WRATH, BUT FOR OBTAINING SALVATION THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. (1ST THESSALONIANS 5:9)*²⁸

[According to the context of 1st Thessalonians 5:9, this “wrath” to come will take place during “the Great Tribulation.” At that time, God will pour forth a series of divine judgments against a world that has rejected His authority over their lives (by rejecting His will as revealed in the Bible). By means of the Rapture, Jesus Christ will deliver His Church from these judgments when He summons her to meet Him in the clouds. Afterwards, God will pour out His anger upon the world with increasing frequency and intensity in the form

of global and cosmic destructions, climaxing in the Second Coming of Christ (as described in Revelation 6-19).]

15) At the Rapture, those believers who are alive will rise to meet the Lord

*FOR THE LORD HIMSELF WILL DESCEND FROM HEAVEN ... THEN WE WHO ARE ALIVE AND REMAIN WILL BE CAUGHT UP ... IN THE CLOUDS TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR (1ST THESSALONIANS 4:16-17)*²⁹

[“in the clouds” ... “in the air.” At the Second Coming of Christ, Jesus comes down to earth (Zechariah 14:4). But at the Rapture He does not come to earth. Believers who are “alive and remain” will rise to meet Him “in the clouds” ... “in the air.”]

16) When Christ summons His Church from the earth, the souls of deceased believers will accompany Him

*FOR IF WE BELIEVE THAT JESUS DIED AND ROSE AGAIN, EVEN SO GOD WILL BRING WITH HIM THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP IN JESUS. (1ST THESSALONIANS 4:14)*³⁰

[“God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.” When a believer dies, his body is laid in a grave, but his soul immediately goes to be with the Lord (2nd Corinthians 5:6-8). (There is no such thing as “soul sleep.”) At the Rapture of the Church, the souls of *these deceased Church Age believers* will accompany Jesus to the clouds; and from there, the Lord will summon their *bodies* to come forth from their graves. Their bodies, now glorified, will then be reunited with their already-perfected souls.]

17) When Christ summons Church Age believers to meet Him in the clouds, the bodies of deceased believers will be resurrected and rise ahead of those still living

*FOR THIS WE SAY TO YOU BY THE WORD OF THE LORD, THAT WE WHO ARE ALIVE AND REMAIN UNTIL THE COMING OF THE LORD, WILL NOT PRECEDE THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP. FOR THE LORD HIMSELF WILL DESCEND FROM HEAVEN WITH A SHOUT, WITH THE VOICE OF THE ARCHANGEL AND WITH THE TRUMPET OF GOD, AND THE DEAD IN CHRIST WILL RISE FIRST. THEN WE WHO ARE ALIVE AND REMAIN WILL BE CAUGHT UP TOGETHER WITH THEM IN THE CLOUDS TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR (1ST THESSALONIANS 4:15-17)*³¹

[“the dead in Christ will rise first.” During the Rapture of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ will summon the bodies of deceased Church Age believers to come forth from their graves. It is at this time that He will reunite their bodies, now glorified, with their already-perfected souls.]

18) At the Rapture, the believer's physical body will become like Christ's glorified body

FOR OUR CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN, FROM WHICH ALSO WE EAGERLY WAIT FOR A SAVIOR, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST; WHO 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 3:20-21) ³²

WE OURSELVES, HAVING THE FIRST FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT, EVEN WE OURSELVES GROAN WITHIN OURSELVES, WAITING EAGERLY FOR OUR ADOPTION AS SONS, THE REDEMPTION OF OUR BODY. (ROMANS 8:23) ³³

*["first fruits of the Spirit." "Spirit" is an appositive genitive meaning that 'first fruits' is the Spirit. Not only does all creation groan because of its fallen state (Romans 8:20-22) but so do believers in whom the Spirit of God dwells. Though they possess the benefit of His intimate presence, these reborn Christ followers continue to grieve over their remaining sinfulness, longing for the day when their salvation is *completed*.]*

[The final phase of the believer's salvation, adoption, and redemption have not yet taken place. Known as their "glorification," those in whom God has begun "a good work" will become perfectly conformed to the image of Christ (Philippians 1:6), not just in their physical bodies but in their whole person. This *completed* redemption will take place during the Rapture of the Church.]

BELOVED, NOW WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD, AND IT HAS NOT APPEARED AS YET WHAT WE WILL BE. WE KNOW THAT WHEN HE APPEARS, WE WILL BE LIKE HIM, BECAUSE WE WILL SEE HIM JUST AS HE IS. (1ST JOHN 3:2)

SO ALSO IS THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD. IT (THE BODY) IS SOWN A PERISHABLE BODY, IT IS RAISED AN IMPERISHABLE BODY ... IT IS SOWN IN DISHONOR, IT IS RAISED IN GLORY; IT IS SOWN IN WEAKNESS, IT IS RAISED IN POWER ... IT IS SOWN A NATURAL BODY, IT IS RAISED A SPIRITUAL BODY. ... JUST AS WE HAVE BORNE THE IMAGE OF THE EARTHY, WE WILL ALSO BEAR THE IMAGE OF THE HEAVENLY ... THIS MORTAL MUST PUT ON IMMORTALITY. (1ST CORINTHIANS 15:42-44, 47-49, 53, PARENTHESIS ADDED) ³⁴

[God has designed a body perfect for resurrection life. Notice the contrast made between the bodies of believers when they are buried ("sown") and the new bodies they will have once they are raised from the grave. Their resurrection bodies will be "*imperishable*." They will no longer be subject to sickness, death, or decay ("perishable"). They will be "*raised in glory*." Shame from the ravages of sin ("dishonor") will be forever removed. They will be "*raised in power*," no longer frail regarding temptations ("weakness"). And they will be "*raised (as) spiritual*" bodies, no longer subject to the limits of time and space ("natural bodies").]

[The resurrection body of Jesus Christ is the perfect example of what our glorified bodies will be like. Every believer will bear the image of Christ's body fit for heaven ("spiritual") just as he has borne the image of Adam's body on earth ("earthy"). Taken from the *MacArthur Study Bible*, MacArthur, John, footnotes: 1st Corinthians 15:39-42a, 42b-44, 45-49]

BEHOLD, I TELL YOU A MYSTERY ... WE WILL ALL BE CHANGED IN A MOMENT, IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE
(1ST CORINTHIANS 15:51-52) ³⁵

[*"mystery."* The Rapture of the Church was a mystery; that is, it was unknown in the Old Testament but now revealed through the writings of the New Testament apostles (Ephesians 3:4-5).]

[*"changed."* At the Rapture, the believer will become perfectly conformed to the image of Christ, not just in his physical body but in his whole person (1st John 3:2).]

[*"the twinkling of an eye."* God will complete this transformation instantly.]

WE WILL ALL BE CHANGED ... AT THE LAST TRUMPET. *(1ST CORINTHIANS 15:52)* ³⁶

[*"the last trumpet."* "The trumpet, as in the Old Testament, signaled the appearance of God." *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, NT*, Lowery, David K., 1st Corinthians 15:52, page 545.] At the sounding of this trumpet, Jesus will remove all Church Age believers from the earth.]

THE TRUMPET WILL SOUND, AND THE DEAD WILL BE RAISED IMPERISHABLE. *(1ST CORINTHIANS 15:52)* ³⁷

[*"the dead will be raised imperishable."* Christ will summon deceased Church Age believers from their graves, reuniting their glorified bodies with their perfected souls (that are presently with the Lord). (Believers who are still living at the time of the Rapture will also be changed and follow those raised from their graves into the clouds to meet the Lord Jesus.)]

BUT WHEN THIS PERISHABLE WILL HAVE PUT ON THE IMPERISHABLE, AND THIS MORTAL WILL HAVE PUT ON IMMORTALITY, THEN WILL COME ABOUT THE SAYING THAT IS WRITTEN, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY." *(1ST CORINTHIANS 15:54)* ³⁸

[*"death is swallowed up in victory."* At the Rapture of the Church, the power of death will be fully and forever removed from the believer.]

WE KNOW THAT IF THE EARTHLY TENT WHICH IS OUR HOUSE IS TORN DOWN, WE HAVE A BUILDING FROM GOD, A HOUSE NOT MADE WITH HANDS, ETERNAL IN THE HEAVENS. *(2ND CORINTHIANS 5:1)* ³⁹

[*"we have a building from God ... eternal in the heavens."* God will clothe His resurrected people with physical bodies that are "fit" to thrive in His eternal kingdom. Unlike our earthly bodies – frail and temporary – glorified bodies will be strong and permanent.]

HAVING PUT IT ON, WE WILL NOT BE FOUND NAKED. *(2ND CORINTHIANS 5:3)* ⁴⁰

[*"we will not be found naked."* The believer will not be bodiless after his resurrection. He will receive a body "not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," conformed to the glorified body of Christ.]

[“Paul knew that Christian death would not mean being released into a nebulous, spiritual infinity. Rather, it would mean the receiving of a glorified, spiritual, immortal, perfect, qualitatively different but nonetheless real body, just as Jesus received.” *The MacArthur Study Bible*, MacArthur, John, footnote: 2nd Corinthians 5:3]

19) At the Rapture, each believer will receive the glorious perfections of Christ

*BELOVED, NOW WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD, AND IT HAS NOT APPEARED AS YET WHAT WE WILL BE. WE KNOW THAT WHEN HE APPEARS, WE WILL BE LIKE HIM, BECAUSE WE WILL SEE HIM JUST AS HE IS. (1ST JOHN 3:2)*⁴¹

[“we will be like Him.” The believer’s glorification is not limited to the physical body. Instead, it is a whole person transformation.]

*AND WE KNOW THAT GOD CAUSES ALL THINGS TO WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THOSE WHO LOVE GOD, TO THOSE WHO ARE CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE. FOR THOSE WHOM HE FOREKNEW, HE ALSO PREDESTINED TO BECOME CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON, SO THAT HE (CHRIST JESUS) WOULD BE THE FIRSTBORN AMONG MANY BRETHREN; AND THESE WHOM HE PREDESTINED, HE ALSO CALLED; AND THESE WHOM HE CALLED, HE ALSO JUSTIFIED; AND THESE WHOM HE JUSTIFIED, HE ALSO GLORIFIED. (ROMANS 8:28-30)*⁴²

[“for good.” The Apostle Paul explains the meaning of verse 28’s “good” in verse 29: “to become conformed to the image of His Son.” Every event of our lives – including temptations, suffering, successes, and failures – contributes to our being “sculpted” into the likeness of Christ. This is the promise. Then, at the Appearing of Christ (at the Rapture of the Church), this *process* of sanctification will be immediately and fully completed. (We will be “glorified.”)]

*... AWAITING EAGERLY THE REVELATION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, WHO WILL ALSO CONFIRM YOU TO THE END, BLAMELESS IN THE DAY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. (1ST CORINTHIANS 1:7-8)*⁴³

[“the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Refers to the Rapture of the Church when Christ summons the redeemed to meet Him “in the air.” (This “Day” is different from “the Day of the Lord,” a term referring to God’s judgment of the ungodly.)]

[“blameless.” Christ promises believers that, when He returns, they will be free from accusation. No wonder those who are justified (declared righteous) by God’s grace “await eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 7)! “All true believers will be fixed solidly forever as holy and without sin in full resurrected glory and purity to live in heaven with God forever.” *The MacArthur Study Bible*, MacArthur, John, footnote: 1st Corinthians 1:7]

*... HE MIGHT SANCTIFY HER (THE CHURCH), HAVING CLEANSED HER BY THE WASHING OF WATER WITH THE WORD, THAT HE MIGHT PRESENT TO HIMSELF THE CHURCH IN ALL HER GLORY, HAVING NO SPOT OR WRINKLE OR ANY SUCH THING; BUT THAT SHE WOULD BE HOLY AND BLAMELESS. (EPHESIANS 5:26-27, PARENTHESIS ADDED)*⁴⁴

*BUT WE SHOULD ALWAYS GIVE THANKS TO GOD FOR YOU, BRETHREN BELOVED BY THE LORD, BECAUSE GOD HAS CHOSEN YOU FROM THE BEGINNING FOR SALVATION (I.E., TO BE DELIVERED FROM THE PRESENCE OF SIN UNTO GLORY, ONE'S GLORIFICATION) THROUGH (THE PROCESS OF) SANCTIFICATION BY (THE POWER OF) THE SPIRIT AND (BY MEANS OF) FAITH IN THE TRUTH. IT WAS FOR THIS HE CALLED YOU THROUGH OUR GOSPEL, THAT YOU MAY GAIN THE GLORY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. (2ND THESSALONIANS 2:13-14, PARENTHESIS ADDED)*⁴⁵

*BLESSED BE THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, WHO ACCORDING TO HIS GREAT MERCY HAS CAUSED US TO BE BORN AGAIN TO A LIVING HOPE THROUGH THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD ... WHO ARE PROTECTED BY THE POWER OF GOD THROUGH FAITH FOR A SALVATION, READY TO BE REVEALED IN THE LAST TIME. (1ST PETER 1:3, 5, PARENTHESIS ADDED)*⁴⁶

[*"for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."* Believers possess salvation now but will experience its completion at the Rapture. This deliverance from the *presence* of sin unto eternal glory marks the completion of 'the salvation of their souls' (1st Peter 1:9). This final phase of deliverance will take place "in the last time," that is, at the end of the Church Age.]

*THEREFORE, PREPARE YOUR MINDS FOR ACTION, KEEP SOBER IN SPIRIT, FIX YOUR HOPE COMPLETELY ON THE GRACE TO BE BROUGHT TO YOU AT THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST. (1ST PETER 1:13)*⁴⁷

[*"prepare your minds for action."* Be disciplined in your thinking by rejecting the world's deceptions and distractions, focusing, instead, on God's Truth.]

[*"keep sober in spirit."* "Stay in charge of your priorities. Maintain an eternal perspective. Remain steadfast, self-controlled, clear-minded, and morally decisive rather than chasing after the world's shiny tinsel and fool's gold."]

[*"fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you."* "Lock your focus on the gifts of eternal life and glory in the Presence of Christ." This completion of one's salvation will take place "at the revelation of Jesus Christ," that is, during the Rapture.]

20) The Rapture will take place "at the proper time"

*KEEP THE COMMANDMENT WITHOUT STAIN OR REPROACH UNTIL THE APPEARING OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, WHICH HE WILL BRING ABOUT AT THE PROPER TIME — HE WHO IS THE BLESSED AND ONLY SOVEREIGN, THE KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. (1ST TIMOTHY 6:14-15)*⁴⁸

[*"at the proper time."* The Church longs for the Rapture. ("How much longer must we endure these assaults from Satan and the world, O Lord?") But the Father's timing is perfect. His deliverance of us "from the wrath to come" will not take place one minute too soon or one minute too late.]

C. Divine Acknowledgment

21) The Son of God will acknowledge the believer to be His own before the Father and the angels

HE WHO OVERCOMES ... I WILL CONFESS HIS NAME BEFORE MY FATHER AND BEFORE HIS ANGELS.
(REVELATION 3:5; SEE COLOSSIANS 1:22)⁴⁹

[“*He who overcomes.*” One “who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” That is, he believes that Jesus is God, that the Father sent Him to serve as “the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world,” and that His Sacrifice is the payment for *his* sins. The overcomer is one who is saved (1st John 5:4-5).]

[“*I will confess his name.*” “*his name,*” not “*their names.*” Jesus Christ promises to acknowledge *each individual believer* as belonging to Him and is, therefore, safe from condemnation.]

D. The Judgment of God (in General)

22) Jesus Christ will judge all humanity

FOR EVERYONE WILL BE SALTED WITH FIRE. (MARK 9:49)⁵⁰

[This promise is the conclusion of the verses above it (vss. 42-48). *All humanity* will experience some type of suffering (“salted with fire”) *appropriate to their relationship with Jesus*. Unbelievers will experience an *eternity* of fiery judgment (as *punishment for their sins*). Believers will experience in *this life* the fiery trials of suffering and persecution (to *purify* their lives *from sin*).]

23) The judgment of each person will be based upon his works

(GOD) WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: TO THOSE WHO BY PERSEVERANCE IN DOING GOOD SEEK FOR GLORY AND HONOR AND IMMORTALITY, ETERNAL LIFE; BUT TO THOSE WHO ARE SELFISHLY AMBITIOUS AND DO NOT OBEY THE TRUTH, BUT OBEY UNRIGHTEOUSNESS, WRATH AND INDIGNATION. (ROMANS 2:6-8)⁵¹

[The book of Romans “walks through” the process of salvation, from start (the condemnation of sinful man) to finish (the glorification of the redeemed). But before Paul presents man’s problem (“all have sinned”) and God’s solution (one becomes righteous, not by works of the Law but by grace through faith), he presents this foundational reality in 2:6-8: “*God will judge man by his works. For one to earn eternal life, he must persevere in perfection. If he disobeys God – even once – he will experience God’s wrath.*” Paul is not

teaching salvation by works. He is laying a foundation upon which he will later present *man's dire need* for God's plan of *salvation by faith in Christ alone* (thank God!) and *not by works* (something *impossible* for helpless man).]

FOR JUDGMENT WILL BE MERCILESS TO ONE WHO HAS SHOWN NO MERCY; MERCY TRIUMPHS OVER JUDGMENT.
(JAMES 2:13) ⁵²

[*"For judgment will be merciless."* This is a promise of God's strict, eternal condemnation, reserved for those who have shown no compassion toward the needy. For one to show no mercy toward those who are helpless is proof that he never sensed his own helpless need for the mercy of God and cried to Him for help. It is evidence of being unredeemed.]

[*"mercy triumphs over judgment."* The one who shows mercy to the helpless is ready to face the God of justice. By showing mercy to the needy, he proves he knows what it is like to need and receive God's mercy through the Cross of Christ. Having received God's mercy-laden salvation, he will not have to endure the eternal wrath of God's just punishment.]

[To show mercy toward the helpless is one thing. To show mercy toward the unrepentant is something else. There are times to hold someone accountable.]

24) Christ will judge all humanity with a just and thorough scrutiny

... ON THE DAY WHEN, ACCORDING TO MY GOSPEL, GOD WILL JUDGE THE SECRETS OF MEN THROUGH CHRIST JESUS. (ROMANS 2:16) ⁵³

[The coming judgment of God is a promise; and His Agent of this judgment is His Son, Jesus Christ.]

FOR NOT EVEN THE FATHER JUDGES ANYONE, BUT HE HAS GIVEN ALL JUDGMENT TO THE SON ... AND HE GAVE HIM AUTHORITY TO EXECUTE JUDGMENT, BECAUSE HE IS THE SON OF MAN.
(JOHN 5:22, 27; SEE ALSO ACTS 10:42, 17:31)

[Christ's ability to judge with thorough integrity is based on His omniscience, enabling Him to reveal and evaluate even the "secrets" of men. These "*secrets of men*" (literally, "the hidden things of men") refer to the *motives* behind their actions.]

FOR I AM CONSCIOUS OF NOTHING AGAINST MYSELF, YET I AM NOT BY THIS ACQUITTED; BUT THE ONE WHO EXAMINES ME IS THE LORD. THEREFORE DO NOT GO ON PASSING JUDGMENT BEFORE THE TIME, BUT WAIT UNTIL THE LORD COMES WHO WILL BOTH BRING TO LIGHT THE THINGS HIDDEN IN THE DARKNESS AND DISCLOSE THE MOTIVES OF MEN'S HEARTS; AND THEN EACH MAN'S PRAISE WILL COME TO HIM FROM GOD. (1ST CORINTHIANS 4:4-5)

E. The Judgment Seat of Christ

25) Christ will judge the quality and motives of a believer's works

*NOW IF ANY MAN BUILDS ON THE FOUNDATION WITH GOLD, SILVER, PRECIOUS STONES, WOOD, HAY, STRAW, EACH MAN'S WORK WILL BECOME EVIDENT; FOR THE DAY WILL SHOW IT BECAUSE IT IS TO BE REVEALED WITH FIRE, AND THE FIRE ITSELF WILL TEST THE **QUALITY** OF EACH MAN'S WORK. IF ANY MAN'S WORK WHICH HE HAS BUILT ON IT REMAINS, HE WILL RECEIVE A REWARD. (1ST CORINTHIANS 3:12-14)* ⁵⁴

[The believer is saved *by grace through faith*. But at the Judgment Seat of Christ, his life will be evaluated *according to his works*. This judgment, however, does *not* concern his sins. The believer's sins have been fully and forever forgiven, to be "remembered no more." The issue at this judgment will be his *stewardship* of the resources entrusted to his care to strengthen God's Church and to exalt God's Name. If he has been faithful, Christ will reward him. If not, he will remain saved but will suffer a loss of rewards (verse 15).]

*THEREFORE, DO NOT GO ON PASSING JUDGMENT BEFORE THE TIME, BUT WAIT UNTIL THE LORD COMES WHO WILL BOTH BRING TO LIGHT THE THINGS HIDDEN IN THE DARKNESS AND DISCLOSE THE **MOTIVES** OF MEN'S HEARTS; AND THEN EACH MAN'S PRAISE WILL COME TO HIM FROM GOD. (1ST CORINTHIANS 4:5)* ⁵⁵

[*"will bring to light ... and disclose."* Christ can judge believers' motives with a just and thorough scrutiny because of His penetrating omniscience.]

*THEN I TURNED TO SEE THE VOICE THAT WAS SPEAKING WITH ME. AND HAVING TURNED I SAW ... ONE LIKE A SON OF MAN, CLOTHED IN A ROBE REACHING TO THE FEET, AND GIRDED ACROSS HIS CHEST WITH A GOLDEN SASH. HIS HEAD AND HIS HAIR WERE WHITE LIKE WHITE WOOL, LIKE SNOW; AND **HIS EYES WERE LIKE A FLAME OF FIRE** ... AND HE PLACED HIS RIGHT HAND ON ME, SAYING, "DO NOT BE AFRAID; I AM THE FIRST AND THE LAST, AND THE LIVING ONE; AND I WAS DEAD, AND BEHOLD, I AM ALIVE FOREVERMORE (REVELATION 1:12-18)*

*FOR NO MAN CAN LAY A FOUNDATION OTHER THAN THE ONE WHICH IS LAID, WHICH IS JESUS CHRIST. NOW IF ANY MAN BUILDS ON THE FOUNDATION WITH GOLD, SILVER, PRECIOUS STONES, WOOD, HAY, STRAW, EACH MAN'S WORK WILL BECOME EVIDENT; FOR THE DAY WILL SHOW IT BECAUSE **IT IS TO BE REVEALED WITH FIRE, AND THE FIRE ITSELF WILL TEST THE QUALITY OF EACH MAN'S WORK.** (1ST CORINTHIANS 3:11-13)*

[*"the things hidden in darkness."* The focus of Christ's careful examination is not only on the believer's outward actions (his "works") but also on his inward devotion, revealed by the *motives, thoughts, and attitudes* behind his actions.]

[*"then each man's praise will come to him."* Having evaluated his outward actions and inward devotion, Christ will make known His findings to the one under investigation (and perhaps to others), praising each of His servants for his faithful stewardship.]

... KNOWING THAT WHATEVER GOOD THING EACH ONE DOES, THIS HE WILL RECEIVE BACK FROM THE LORD, WHETHER SLAVE OR FREE. (EPHESIANS 6:8)⁵⁶

[The context of this verse concerns the attitude and work ethic a *slave* should have as he serves his master. He is to be (1) obedient, (2) fearful, (3) respectful, (4) sincere (that is, from the heart), as though he were serving Christ Himself, (5) consistent (not only when his master is watching), and (6) having good will. Although the faithful slave is not promised to be rewarded by his earthly master (maybe he will be, maybe not), he is promised to receive a reward by the Lord (at the Judgment Seat of Christ).]

[It is assumed that this promise also has a broader application to include the attitude and work ethic that employees should have toward their employers and employers toward their employees.]

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)⁵⁷

[“*the reward of the inheritance.*” The attitude of a believing slave toward his earthly master (or a believing employee toward his boss) is to be one of sincerity of heart, whether his master / boss is watching or not. What motivates him to do so is his abiding reverence for the Lord (Who is always watching). To him the Lord will give just and eternal compensation for his efforts, no matter what he receives in this life. His ultimate ‘payday’ will come from his all-knowing Master.]

26) Christ will hold those who teach God’s Word to a higher standard of evaluation

LET NOT MANY OF YOU BECOME TEACHERS, MY BRETHREN, KNOWING THAT AS SUCH WE WILL INCUR A STRICTER JUDGMENT. (JAMES 3:1)⁵⁸

[“*my brethren.*” Since James uses the words “my brethren” and “we,” true believers (not false teachers) are the intended recipients of this challenging verse.]

[“*a stricter judgment.*” Because this passage addresses true believers, this judgment will take place at the Judgment Seat of Christ Jesus.]

[“*we will incur a stricter judgment.*” This promise of a stricter evaluation by Christ is meant to caution those who assume a teaching or preaching role of the seriousness of that ministry. He is responsible to be *accurate* in what he teaches others; and he is responsible to *believe and obey* that truth.]

27) Each believer will receive his own rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ

*NOW HE WHO PLANTS AND HE WHO WATERS ARE ONE; BUT EACH WILL RECEIVE HIS OWN REWARD ACCORDING TO HIS OWN LABOR. (1ST CORINTHIANS 3:8)*⁵⁹

[*“each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.”* Even though two (or more) believers often minister as a team (that is, they “are one”), Christ will not reward them *as a team*. He will reward each team member *individually* for the quality and motivation of his own service and his own devotion to Christ. Within any given team, there may be differing levels of quality, motivation, and devotion.]

*... IN THE FUTURE THERE IS LAID UP FOR ME THE CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, WHICH THE LORD, THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGE, WILL AWARD TO ME ON THAT DAY; AND NOT ONLY TO ME, BUT ALSO TO ALL WHO HAVE LOVED HIS APPEARING. (2ND TIMOTHY 4:8)*⁶⁰

[*“the crown of righteousness.”* The word “of” has the idea of “consisting of.” That is, eternal righteousness *is* the “substance” of the crown. When this life is over, Christ Jesus will reward the believer with perfect righteousness (glorification).]

[*“to all who have loved His appearing.”* God promises this reward to those who long for the return of Christ for His Church at the Rapture (that is, all true believers).]

28) The rewards a believer receives at the Judgment Seat of Christ will be eternal

*EVERYONE WHO COMPETES IN THE GAMES EXERCISES SELF-CONTROL IN ALL THINGS. THEY THEN DO IT TO RECEIVE A PERISHABLE WREATH, BUT WE AN IMPERISHABLE. (1ST CORINTHIANS 9:25)*⁶¹

[*“the one who sows to the Spirit will ... reap eternal life.”* Though the context has to do with financial support of Christian workers, this principle may also be applied more broadly as an investment in one’s spiritual life. In other words, the believer who trusts the Spirit of God to motivate and empower him to obey the will of the Father (thus promoting his own spiritual growth) will experience – in this life – the highest quality of living possible.]

[*“exercises self-control.”* Strict discipline is essential for one “to receive ... an imperishable wreath” at the Judgment Seat of Christ. To maintain this commitment over the long term, one must cultivate an eternal perspective. This involves saying “No” to certain rights, privileges, and opportunities – designed to promote one’s *temporal* welfare – so that one might say “Yes” to the responsibilities of his God-ordained calling.]

[*“(in order) to receive ... an imperishable (wreath).”* Notice that one’s desire *to gain eternal rewards* is an *acceptable* motive for faithful stewardship. Other appropriate incentives behind one’s labor in Christ’s Name would include *the growth of God’s people* and *the glory of God’s Name*.]

*... WHATEVER A MAN SOWS, THIS HE WILL ALSO REAP ... THE ONE WHO SOWS TO THE SPIRIT WILL FROM THE SPIRIT REAP ETERNAL LIFE. LET US NOT LOSE HEART IN DOING GOOD, FOR IN DUE TIME WE WILL REAP IF WE DO NOT GROW WEARY. (GALATIANS 6:7-9)*⁶²

[*“the one who sows to the Spirit will ... reap eternal life.”* The context of Galatians 6:6-10 has to do with the believer’s financial support of Christian workers. If he invests his finances to advance the Savior’s Church, that investment will bear eternal rewards.]

DO NOT STORE UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES ON EARTH, WHERE MOTH AND RUST DESTROY, AND WHERE THIEVES BREAK IN AND STEAL. BUT STORE UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES IN HEAVEN, WHERE NEITHER MOTH NOR RUST DESTROYS, AND WHERE THIEVES DO NOT BREAK IN OR STEAL; FOR WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS, THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE ALSO. (MATTHEW 6:19-21)

[*“Let us not lose heart in doing good ... do not grow weary.”* Though at times the believer will be tempted to give up because of the little fruit he sees from his labors, he is encouraged to persevere. The harvest is sure. His reward will eventually come. Perhaps he will receive a partial reward in this life; but most certainly, his reward will be given in full, awarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ.]

[Though the context deals primarily with the believer’s use of his financial resources to support Christian workers, this principle may also be applied more broadly as an investment in one’s spiritual life. The believer who trusts the Spirit of God to motivate and empower him to obey the will of the Father (thus promoting his own spiritual growth) will experience the highest quality of living possible, both in this life and throughout eternity.]

29) Faithful pastors will receive an eternal reward

*AND WHEN THE CHIEF SHEPHERD APPEARS, YOU WILL RECEIVE THE UNFADING CROWN OF GLORY. (1ST PETER 5:4)*⁶³

[*“you.”* According to 5:1, the “you” refers to “the elders among you.”]

[*“the unfading crown of glory.”* That is, “the crown *consisting of* glory.” Glory is the “substance” of this crown.]

[At their judgment Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd, will evaluate the ministry of these church leaders (His under shepherds). Often held in contempt and maligned on earth, those pastors who are faithful will receive glory in heaven.]

30) Believers who meet the needs of other believers will receive an eternal reward

*FOR WHOEVER GIVES YOU A CUP OF WATER TO DRINK BECAUSE OF YOUR NAME AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST, TRULY I SAY TO YOU, HE WILL NOT LOSE HIS REWARD. (MARK 9:41)*⁶⁴

[*“whoever gives you a cup of water to drink.”* The one who performs even the smallest act of hospitality toward another because of his commitment to Christ will receive an eternal reward.]

31) Believers who suffer loss because of their identification with and service for Christ will be received and honored by the Father

[The context of the following two promises (65 and 66) – eternal life and eternal glory – have to do with the losses one will suffer as he identifies with and serves Christ Jesus (12:25).]

HE WHO LOVES HIS LIFE LOSES IT, AND HE WHO HATES HIS LIFE IN THIS WORLD WILL KEEP IT TO LIFE ETERNAL.
(JOHN 12:25) ⁶⁵

[*“he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal (vs. 25).”* Eternal life is not earned by sacrificial service. It is given to those who depend upon the death of Christ to serve as payment for their sins. If that faith is genuine, it will cause the true believer to gladly die to self-centered interests and to live, instead, for the interests of Christ. It is this kind of faith that results in eternal life.]

IF ANYONE SERVES ME, HE MUST FOLLOW ME; AND WHERE I AM, THERE MY SERVANT WILL BE ALSO; IF ANYONE SERVES ME, THE FATHER WILL HONOR HIM. (JOHN 12:26) ⁶⁶

[*“If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also (vs. 26).”* Christ requires the one who “serves” Him to “follow” Him. To follow Jesus is to follow His example of dying to self (that is, saying “No” to one’s self-centered interests) while submitting his will to the will of the Father, even to the point of humiliation, persecution, and death. *“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me”* (John 6:38). This is what it means to be like a grain of wheat that “falls into the earth and dies” (vs. 24) ... to “hate one’s life in this world” (vs. 25).]

[*“the Father will honor him (vs. 26).”* This life of obedience will be honored later by the Father in glory.]

32) At the Judgment Seat of Christ, an unfaithful believer will suffer a loss of rewards but will, nevertheless, remain saved

IF ANY MAN’S WORK IS BURNED UP, HE WILL SUFFER LOSS; BUT HE HIMSELF WILL BE SAVED, YET SO AS THROUGH FIRE. (1ST CORINTHIANS 3:15) ⁶⁷

[The believer is saved *by grace through faith*. But at the Judgment Seat of Christ, his life will be evaluated *according to his works*. This judgment, however, does *not* concern his sins. The believer’s sins have been fully and forever forgiven, to be “remembered no more.” The issue at this judgment will be his *stewardship* of the resources entrusted to his care to strengthen God’s Church and to exalt God’s Name. If he has *not* been faithful, he will suffer the loss of rewards (but remain saved).]

F. The Second Coming

33) Jesus Christ will return to earth

*... SO CHRIST ALSO, HAVING BEEN OFFERED ONCE TO BEAR THE SINS OF MANY, WILL APPEAR A SECOND TIME FOR SALVATION WITHOUT REFERENCE TO SIN, TO THOSE WHO EAGERLY AWAIT HIM. (HEBREWS 9:28)*⁶⁸

[“without reference to sin.” In His first coming Christ dealt with sin once for all.]

... BUT HE, HAVING OFFERED ONE SACRIFICE FOR SINS FOR ALL TIME, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, WAITING FROM THAT TIME ONWARD UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET. FOR BY ONE OFFERING HE HAS PERFECTED FOR ALL TIME THOSE WHO ARE SANCTIFIED. (HEBREWS 10:12-14)

[This purpose of the second appearance of Christ is not to, once again, “take away the sins of the world” but to complete His work of redemption for creation and for His adopted sons (Romans 8:18-23).]

*JOHN TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES THAT ARE IN ASIA: GRACE TO YOU AND PEACE, FROM HIM WHO IS AND WHO WAS AND WHO IS TO COME (REVELATION 1:4)*⁶⁹

*"I AM THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA," SAYS THE LORD GOD, "WHO IS AND WHO WAS AND WHO IS TO COME, THE ALMIGHTY." (REVELATION 1:8)*⁷⁰

[“Who is to come,” a reference to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Revelation 1:7 assures us of the certainty of this promise. It also informs us of the initial location of His Appearing (“with the clouds”), those who will witness this event (the entire population of the earth), and their response to this incredible sight (they will mourn).]

BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, AND EVERY EYE WILL SEE HIM, EVEN THOSE WHO PIERCED HIM; AND ALL THE TRIBES OF THE EARTH WILL MOURN OVER HIM. SO IT IS TO BE. AMEN. (REVELATION 1:7)

34) Once events are set in motion, the Second Coming of Christ will take place quickly

*FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY. (HEBREWS 10:37)*⁷¹

[“will not delay.” As world events unfold leading up to Christ’s Return, these events leading up to His Appearing will take place quickly.]

35) At the Second Coming, Jesus Christ will return to judge the world

*... AND TO GIVE RELIEF TO YOU WHO ARE AFFLICTED AND TO US AS WELL WHEN THE LORD JESUS WILL BE REVEALED FROM HEAVEN WITH HIS MIGHTY ANGELS IN FLAMING FIRE. (2ND THESSALONIANS 1:7)*⁷²

[At His Second Coming, the Lord Jesus will be revealed to the world, not as the Savior from sin but as the Judge of unrepentant sinners. Angels will accompany Him when He comes in judgment.]

36) At the Second Coming of Christ, Church Age saints will return with Him in glory

*WHEN CHRIST, WHO IS OUR LIFE, IS REVEALED, THEN YOU ALSO WILL BE REVEALED WITH HIM IN GLORY. (COLOSSIANS 3:4)*⁷³

37) The Second Coming of Christ will deliver from persecution those saints who have lived through the Great Tribulation

*FOR AFTER ALL IT IS ONLY JUST FOR GOD ... TO GIVE RELIEF TO YOU WHO ARE AFFLICTED AND TO US AS WELL WHEN THE LORD JESUS WILL BE REVEALED FROM HEAVEN WITH HIS MIGHTY ANGELS IN FLAMING FIRE (2ND THESSALONIANS 1:6-7)*⁷⁴

[“to give relief to you who are afflicted.” At the Second Coming of Christ, *believers who are still living* will experience relief from the suffering they have received at the hands of their persecutors. Jesus will return as the One Who judges those who afflict His people. Powerful angels will be with Him to carry out His bidding.]

[To be sure, those who die during persecution experience relief from suffering. But they are not yet vindicated until God punishes their enemies. *Those who have died as martyrs for the sake of Christ* are waiting in heaven for this vindication (Revelation 6:9-11).]

38) The Second Coming of Christ will be a time of divine retribution upon unbelievers

*FOR AFTER ALL IT IS ONLY JUST FOR GOD TO REPAY WITH AFFLICTION THOSE WHO AFFLICT YOU ... WHEN THE LORD JESUS WILL BE REVEALED FROM HEAVEN WITH HIS MIGHTY ANGELS IN FLAMING FIRE, DEALING OUT RETRIBUTION TO THOSE WHO DO NOT KNOW GOD AND TO THOSE WHO DO NOT OBEY THE GOSPEL OF OUR LORD JESUS. THESE WILL PAY THE PENALTY OF ETERNAL DESTRUCTION, AWAY FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD AND FROM THE GLORY OF HIS POWER.” (2ND THESSALONIANS 1:6-9)*⁷⁵

[“to repay with affliction those who afflict you.” In righteous judgment Jesus Christ will “repay” the wicked who have rejected the knowledge of God they possessed, who have rejected the salvation God offered them through His Son, and who have afflicted His

people. According to the context, this group of unbelievers are those who persecuted the generation of believers living at the time of the Second Coming.]

[In matters of *spiritual persecution*, God is to be the One who vindicates His people by punishing their antagonists. These actions of retribution are the right and responsibility of the God of perfect justice, not that of imperfect man. This ensures that the punishment is not too lenient (“a tooth for an eye”) or too strict (“an eye for a tooth”). When and how God repays are to be determined by Him.]

*FOR WE KNOW HIM WHO SAID, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." AND AGAIN, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE." IT IS A TERRIFYING THING TO FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THE LIVING GOD. (HEBREWS 10:30-31)*⁷⁶

[“*The Lord will judge His people.*” A quote from Deuteronomy 32:36. “His people” refers to that 1st century generation of *unbelieving* Jews who were in the process of pressuring *believing* Jews to return to Judaism. (This is the historical situation found in the book of Hebrews). The author is warning this audience not to identify themselves with this unbelieving generation of Jews who would soon fall under God’s judgment for rejecting His Messiah. This judgment would come in A.D. 70 when Titus and his Roman legions destroyed Jerusalem. Jesus prophesied of this event in Luke 21 (a prophecy with a double fulfillment: A.D. 70 and *during the end times*).]

[This warning-promise still holds true today. At the return of Christ, God will pour out His wrath upon those unbelievers who persecuted the saints, thus avenging their deaths.]

G. The Millennial Kingdom

39) The Millennial Kingdom will be a time of joyful celebration

AND HE SAID TO THEM, "THIS IS MY BLOOD OF THE COVENANT, WHICH IS POURED OUT FOR MANY. TRULY I SAY TO YOU, I WILL NEVER AGAIN DRINK OF THE FRUIT OF THE VINE UNTIL THAT DAY WHEN I DRINK IT NEW IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD." (MARK 14:24-25)⁷⁷

[“*the fruit of the vine.*” Here, the presence of wine is a symbol of joy in the Messianic Age (“the Kingdom of God”).]

40) Those who are rich in faith will inherit the Millennial Kingdom

LISTEN, MY BELOVED BRETHREN: DID NOT GOD CHOOSE THE POOR OF THIS WORLD TO BE RICH IN FAITH AND HEIRS OF THE KINGDOM WHICH HE PROMISED TO THOSE WHO LOVE HIM? (JAMES 2:5)⁷⁸

[“*rich in faith,*” as evidenced by their loving obedience to the will of God.]

41) Those who remain faithful to God as they endure trials and afflictions will reign with Christ in His kingdom

*IF WE ENDURE, WE WILL ALSO REIGN WITH HIM. (2ND TIMOTHY 2:12)*⁷⁹

[“If we endure.” Perseverance during adversity is not the *cause* of salvation. It is proof of salvation. One is not saved by enduring; he endures because he is already saved. Salvation is by faith ... and faith alone.]

42) At the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom, believers will participate in the judgment of the demonic realm

DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT WE WILL JUDGE ANGELS? HOW MUCH MORE MATTERS OF THIS LIFE?
(1ST CORINTHIANS 6:3)⁸⁰

[“we will judge angels.” At some point in the past, God created the angelic population. A portion of these angels later rebelled against Him but were defeated. As a result, they fell from their original sinless condition into a state of evil. Some of these fallen angels have been committed to *Tartarus* (a type of spiritual prison), awaiting their final judgment (2nd Peter 2:4; Jude 6). Others, known as demons or evil spirits, are still free to roam throughout the earth, obeying the will of Satan. Apparently, it is this population of fallen spirit beings (demons) that Christians will judge. This will presumably take place at the *beginning* of that 1,000-year era, after which they will be cast into the abyss with Satan.]

43) During the Millennial Kingdom believers will share in the civil authority of Christ as exalted judges over the nations

OR DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT THE SAINTS WILL JUDGE THE WORLD? IF THE WORLD IS JUDGED BY YOU, ARE YOU NOT COMPETENT TO CONSTITUTE THE SMALLEST LAW COURTS? (1ST CORINTHIANS 6:2)⁸¹

[“the saints will judge the world.” Christians will assist Christ in His judgment of the nations during the Millennial Kingdom.]

44) During the Millennial Kingdom believers will share in the victories and authority of Christ as exalted co-rulers

*HE WHO OVERCOMES, I WILL GRANT TO HIM TO SIT DOWN WITH ME ON MY THRONE, AS I ALSO OVERCAME AND SAT DOWN WITH MY FATHER ON HIS THRONE. (REVELATION 3:21)*⁸²

*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)*⁸³

[*“He who overcomes.”* One “who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” That is, he believes that Jesus is God, that the Father sent Him to serve as “the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world,” and that His Sacrifice is the payment for *his* sins. The overcomer is one who is saved (1st John 5:4-5).]

[*“I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne ... to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron.”* Believers will receive the authority of Jesus Christ over the nations of the world, ruling over them just as firmly as will the Son of God, “with a rod of iron” (see also Daniel 7:22).]

H. The Incineration of Heaven and Earth

45) After the Millennial Kingdom ends, God will incinerate the present heaven and earth

HEAVEN AND EARTH WILL PASS AWAY, BUT MY WORDS WILL NOT PASS AWAY. (MARK 13:31) ⁸⁴

THEN I SAW A GREAT WHITE THRONE AND HIM WHO SAT UPON IT, FROM WHOSE PRESENCE EARTH AND HEAVEN FLED AWAY, AND NO PLACE WAS FOUND FOR THEM. (REVELATION 20:11)

[According to Revelation 20:7-10, this “White Throne” judgment of all unbelievers will follow the conclusion of the Millennial Kingdom and the final defeat of Satan, at which time this present universe will be destroyed.]

BUT THE DAY OF THE LORD WILL COME LIKE A THIEF, IN WHICH THE HEAVENS WILL PASS AWAY WITH A ROAR AND THE ELEMENTS WILL BE DESTROYED WITH INTENSE HEAT, AND THE EARTH AND ITS WORKS WILL BE BURNED UP. SINCE ALL THESE THINGS ARE TO BE DESTROYED IN THIS WAY, WHAT SORT OF PEOPLE OUGHT YOU TO BE IN HOLY CONDUCT AND GODLINESS, LOOKING FOR AND HASTENING THE COMING OF THE DAY OF GOD, BECAUSE OF WHICH THE HEAVENS WILL BE DESTROYED BY BURNING, AND THE ELEMENTS WILL MELT WITH INTENSE HEAT! BUT ACCORDING TO HIS PROMISE WE ARE LOOKING FOR NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH, IN WHICH RIGHTEOUSNESS DWELLS. (2ND PETER 3:10-13) ⁸⁵

[*“the day of the Lord.”* When this term points to end-time events, the word “day” does not refer to one 24-hour period. Instead, it refers to an extended time, beginning with the Great Tribulation (which will arrive “just like a thief in the night,” that is, unexpectedly, 1st Thessalonians 5:2) and ending at the conclusion of the Millennial Kingdom with the destruction of the heavens and earth.]

[*“the elements will be destroyed ... will melt ... with intense heat.”* This present universe will come to a *cataclysmic* end. Perhaps as explained by John MacArthur, “The ‘elements’ are the atomic components ... which make up the composition of all the created matter ... (N)eutrons, protons, and electrons are all going to disintegrate.]

[*“the heavens will pass away with a roar ... will be destroyed by burning.” “the earth and its works will be burned up.”* MacArthur states, “The whole of the physical, natural earth

... with (the) entire universe will be consumed.” The incineration of this present universe will conclude “*the day of the Lord.*”]

[Peter’s use of restatement to describe this future dissolution of the present heavens and earth is meant to convince believers of the urgency to live godly lives now.]

[“*the day of God.*” This term refers to the eternal state, beginning with the creation of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1). This “day” follows the dissolution of the physical universe.]

I. Eternity Future

46) Christ will grant eternal life to the believer as a citizen of the new earth

TO HIM WHO OVERCOMES, I WILL GRANT TO EAT OF THE TREE OF LIFE WHICH IS IN THE PARADISE OF GOD.
(REVELATION 2:7)⁸⁶

[“*He who overcomes.*” One “who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” That is, he believes that Jesus is God, that the Father sent Him to serve as “the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world,” and that His Sacrifice is the payment for *his* sins. The overcomer is one who is saved (1st John 5:4-5).]

[“*to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.*” The tree of life first appeared in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9, 3:22). Anyone who ate from it would “live forever.” After Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree, God positioned a “squad” of cherubim to guard access to the tree, preventing fallen humanity from acquiring eternal life in a state of corruption (Genesis 3:22, 24). That is, this protection was an act of grace.]

[Another tree having the same name (and, presumably, the same function) reappears in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19). Those who eat its fruit will enjoy the fullness of eternal life and continuous blessing.]

47) Christ will identify the believer as a citizen of the new Jerusalem, the capital city of the new earth

HE WHO OVERCOMES ... I WILL WRITE ON HIM THE NAME OF THE CITY OF MY GOD, THE NEW JERUSALEM, WHICH COMES DOWN OUT OF HEAVEN FROM MY GOD (REVELATION 3:12)⁸⁷

[“*He who overcomes.*” One “who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” That is, he believes that Jesus is God, that the Father sent Him to serve as “the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world,” and that His Sacrifice is the payment for *his* sins. The overcomer is one who is saved (1st John 5:4-5).]

[This identification mark is a permanent “imprint” of the city’s name, “the New Jerusalem.”]

III. ABOUT THE FATHER'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH

A. His Abiding Love

48) The Father will love the one who loves the Son (as evidenced by his obedience to the Son)

*HE WHO HAS MY COMMANDMENTS AND KEEPS THEM IS THE ONE WHO LOVES ME; AND HE WHO LOVES ME WILL BE LOVED BY MY FATHER (JOHN 14:21)*⁸⁸

[The extent to which a believer *obeys* the commandments of Christ reveals the extent of his *love for* Christ. It is by the power of God, not by human effort, that these expressions of love for the Savior are generated (Romans 5:5; Galatians 5:22). In response, the Father promises His love to the one who loves His Son.]

*JESUS ANSWERED AND SAID TO HIM, "IF ANYONE LOVES ME, HE WILL KEEP MY WORD; AND MY FATHER WILL LOVE HIM" (JOHN 14:23)*⁸⁹

[A believer's obedience to the Lord's commandments is an outward display of his love for the Son of God.]

[*"He will keep My word."* Practicing a lifestyle of obedience to Christ does not *cause* the rebirth. It is *proof* of the rebirth. (That is, righteous works are an outward display of true saving faith, James 2:14-26.) This promise of *the Father's love*, then, is not earned by obedience. His love is poured out upon those who are already His beloved children *by* grace through faith and *proven* to be so by their obedience.]

49) Nothing can separate the believer from God's love

*WHO WILL SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF CHRIST? WILL TRIBULATION, OR DISTRESS, OR PERSECUTION, OR FAMINE, OR NAKEDNESS, OR PERIL, OR SWORD? ... 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. (ROMANS 8:35, 38-39)*⁹⁰

[Adverse circumstances, life-threatening assaults from evil men and demons, or even death itself cannot separate the believer from God's love.]

B. His Abiding Presence

50) The Father and the Son will abide with the one who loves the Son

*JESUS ANSWERED AND SAID TO HIM, "IF ANYONE LOVES ME, HE WILL KEEP MY WORD ... AND WE (THE FATHER AND THE SON) WILL COME TO HIM AND MAKE OUR ABODE WITH HIM." (JOHN 14:23, PARENTHESIS ADDED)*⁹¹

[This promise found in John 14:23 concerns *the abiding Presence of God the Father and God the Son* with the believer. Since the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit of God *enters* the believer the moment of salvation to live *within* him (John 14:16-17; 1st Corinthians 3:16, 6:19; 2nd Corinthians 6:16).]

51) God, Who will never abandon the believer, is his ever-present “all in all”

MAKE SURE THAT YOUR CHARACTER IS FREE FROM THE LOVE OF MONEY, BEING CONTENT WITH WHAT YOU HAVE; FOR HE HIMSELF HAS SAID, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU."

(HEBREWS 13:5)⁹²

[Rather than allowing one's heart to crave something that is neither permanent nor able to satisfy his desires, the believer is to set his heart on the ever-present One Who will faithfully and abundantly nourish his deepest longings.]

IV. ABOUT THE SON'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH

A. His Abiding Love

52) The Son of God will love the one who loves Him (as evidenced by his obedience)

*HE WHO HAS MY COMMANDMENTS AND KEEPS THEM IS THE ONE WHO LOVES ME; AND HE WHO LOVES ME ... I WILL LOVE HIM (JOHN 14:21)*⁹³

[The Son of God promises to love the one who loves Him. The believer displays his love for Christ by his lifestyle of obedience (James 2:14-26).]

[Obedience, however, is not the *cause* of his salvation; it is the *proof* of his salvation. Since he is born of God, he obeys. Christ is, in fact, promising to love the one who is *already saved* by grace through faith. This faith is a *living* faith that motivates the believer to obey Christ's commandments because of his love for Christ.]

B. His Abiding Presence

53) The believer will know of Christ's indwelling presence in the Father

*IN THAT DAY YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM IN MY FATHER (JOHN 14:20)*⁹⁴

[Some believe this "day" to refer to *the day of Christ's Resurrection*. Others believe this "day" to refer to *the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost* (and ever since). Both Events served as proof of this intimate relationship between the Son and the Father.]

54) The believer will know of Christ's indwelling presence in him

*I WILL NOT LEAVE YOU AS ORPHANS; I WILL COME TO YOU. (JOHN 14:18)*⁹⁵

*IN THAT DAY YOU WILL KNOW THAT ... I (AM) IN YOU. (JOHN 14:20)*⁹⁶

[The moment one is "born again" (that is, the moment of his salvation), the Holy Spirit enters the believer. And through the Scriptures, the Spirit of God convinces the Christian of this intimate relationship between *himself* and the indwelling Spirit of Christ.]

55) The believer will know of his own indwelling presence in Christ

*IN THAT DAY YOU WILL KNOW THAT ... YOU (ARE) IN ME (JOHN 14:20)*⁹⁷

[The moment one is “born again,” the Holy Spirit enters the believer. Using the Word of God, the indwelling Spirit of God informs and convinces the believer of his spiritual position in Jesus Christ.]

56) The Lord Jesus will be ever-present with His Church to empower each generation to participate in the Great Commission

*AND JESUS CAME UP AND SPOKE TO THEM, SAYING, "ALL AUTHORITY HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH. GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL THE NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT, TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THAT I COMMANDED YOU; AND LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, EVEN TO THE END OF THE AGE." (MATTHEW 28:18-20)*⁹⁸

[“I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Christ promises to be present with those who make disciples until He returns to judge the world and establish His earthly Kingdom. It is by His empowering presence that His followers can participate in this staggering commission.]

57) The believer who “follows” Jesus will enjoy the satisfaction of His abiding presence

*IF ANYONE SERVES ME, HE MUST FOLLOW ME; AND WHERE I AM, THERE MY SERVANT WILL BE ALSO (JOHN 12:26A)*⁹⁹

[“If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also (vs. 26).” Christ requires the one who “serves” Him to “follow” Him. To follow Jesus is to follow His example of dying to self (that is, saying “No” to one’s own self-centered interests) while submitting his will to the will of the Father, even to the point of humiliation, persecution, and death. “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38). This is what it means to be like a grain of wheat that “falls into the earth and dies” (vs. 24) ... to “hate one’s life in this world” (vs. 25). (In doing so, the believer will experience an intimate and abundant fellowship with his Master.)]

58) After the believer is ushered into the Lord’s physical presence (either at death or at the Rapture), he will remain in His presence throughout eternity

*TO BE ABSENT FROM THE BODY (IS) TO BE AT HOME WITH THE LORD. (2ND CORINTHIANS 5:8)*¹⁰⁰

[The following three passages refer to the Rapture of the Church.]

*IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE ARE MANY DWELLING PLACES; IF IT WERE NOT SO, I WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU; FOR I GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU. IF I GO AND PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU, I WILL COME AGAIN AND RECEIVE YOU TO MYSELF, THAT WHERE I AM, THERE YOU MAY BE ALSO. (JOHN 14:2-3)*¹⁰¹

[“A place for you” refers to the holy city, the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2, 9-27; 22:1-5), where there are “many dwelling places” in the Father's house.]

*FOR THE LORD HIMSELF WILL DESCEND FROM HEAVEN WITH A SHOUT, WITH THE VOICE OF THE ARCHANGEL AND WITH THE TRUMPET OF GOD, AND THE DEAD IN CHRIST WILL RISE FIRST. THEN WE WHO ARE ALIVE AND REMAIN WILL BE CAUGHT UP TOGETHER WITH THEM IN THE CLOUDS TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR, AND SO WE SHALL ALWAYS BE WITH THE LORD. (1ST THESSALONIANS 4:16-17)*¹⁰²

[At the Rapture Jesus Christ does not come to earth. Believers who are “alive and remain” will rise to “meet” Him “in the clouds” ... “in the air.” This will be a “face-to-Face” introduction to the Lord that deceased believers do not need. Their *souls* have been *with* Him since their deaths (2ND Corinthians 5:6-8).]

*FOR GOD HAS NOT DESTINED US FOR WRATH, BUT FOR OBTAINING SALVATION THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, WHO DIED FOR US, SO THAT WHETHER WE ARE AWAKE OR ASLEEP, WE WILL LIVE TOGETHER WITH HIM. (1ST THESSALONIANS 5:9-10)*¹⁰³

[According to the context of 1st Thessalonians 5:9, this “wrath to come” will take place during “the Great Tribulation.” At that time, God will pour out a series of divine judgments against a world that has rejected His authority over their lives (by rejecting His will as revealed in the Bible). It is from these judgments that Christ will deliver His Church via the Rapture when He summons Her to meet Him in the clouds. Afterwards, He will pour out His anger upon the world with increasing frequency and intensity in the form of global and cosmic destructions (as described in Revelation, chapters 6-19), climaxing in His Second Coming (Revelation 19:11-21).]

V. ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH

A. His Arrival (upon Salvation)

59) Through a living faith in Christ Jesus, the repentant one will receive the Holy Spirit

PETER SAID TO THEM, "REPENT, AND EACH OF YOU BE BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST **FOR** THE FORGIVENESS OF YOUR SINS; AND YOU WILL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT." (ACTS 2:38)¹⁰⁴

[Must one be water baptized to be saved? Understanding the meaning of the word "for" will help us answer this often-asked question from Acts 2:38.

(1) Some take the word "for" in Acts 2:38 to mean "*to obtain*." "John went to school *for* a better-paying job." (That is, "John went to school *to obtain* a better-paying job.") Applying this definition to the above verse, water baptism *is* necessary to be saved: "be baptized ... *to obtain* the forgiveness of your sins." Without water baptism, forgiveness cannot take place.

(2) Others take the word "for" in Acts 2:38 to mean "*because of*" ("*on account of*," "*on the basis of*"). "John earned a promotion *for* his hard work." (That is, "John earned a promotion *because of* his hard work.") Applying this definition to the above verse, water baptism *is not* necessary to be saved: "be baptized ... *because of* the forgiveness of your sins." With this view, water baptism is a physical picture of a spiritual reality that **has already taken place** (forgiveness). (See Matthew 3:11, 12:41.)

What, then, is the correct meaning of the word "for" in Acts 2:38?

The Bible does not contradict itself. It does not teach one way of salvation in a passage over here and another way of salvation in a passage over there. In view of the importance of the Gospel message, it would seem strange indeed for *any* passage explaining the way of salvation to omit the act of water baptism if it *were* a necessary step. But there are many passages that do just that (John 3:16; Acts 10:43-48, 16:29-31, 26:18; Romans 4:1-17, 11:6; Galatians 3:8-9; Ephesians 2:8-9). Even Peter, the speaker in Acts 2:38, did not mention water baptism as necessary for salvation in Acts 10:43 or in 13:38-39. In these passages forgiveness of sins is received through faith alone (See especially 1st Corinthians 1:13-17.)

According to Acts 2:38 a believer *should* be water baptized ... but not to *receive* forgiveness. He is to be baptized *as a public testimony of his identification with Christ Jesus: His death, burial, resurrection, and exaltation to the heavenly places*. All these priceless truths take place the moment one is saved, through faith – and faith alone – in the Son of God. Water baptism, therefore, is a *physical symbol* of these *spiritual realities* that have already occurred, one of which being forgiveness.]

B. His Abiding Presence

60) The Father will send the Holy Spirit to the believer to abide with him forever as his Helper

I WILL ASK THE FATHER, AND HE WILL GIVE YOU ANOTHER HELPER, THAT HE MAY BE WITH YOU FOREVER.
(JOHN 14:16) ¹⁰⁵

[God the Father sent the Holy Spirit to provide everything the believer needs to do the will of the Father.]

[“will give” (i.e., in the future).] God gave this promise to those who became believers *before* the Day of Pentecost. *Since* the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit of God enters and resides *within* the believer the moment of salvation (see 1st Corinthians 3:16).]

C. His Ministry of Illumination

61) The shepherd-teacher who seeks to be faithful to his calling will receive insight from the Lord to achieve this noble commitment

CONSIDER WHAT I SAY, FOR THE LORD WILL GIVE YOU UNDERSTANDING IN EVERYTHING. (2ND TIMOTHY 2:7) ¹⁰⁶

[God gave this promise to a “good soldier of Christ Jesus.” The Apostle Paul is instructing the shepherd-teacher who is devoted to Christ concerning what it will take for him to realize a successful ministry: long-term discipline, hard work, and single-mindedness.]

D. His Help for Witnessing

62) The believer will receive power from the Holy Spirit to effectively declare the Gospel of Jesus Christ

... BUT YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS COME UPON YOU (ACTS 1:8) ¹⁰⁷

WHEN THE HELPER COMES, WHOM I WILL SEND TO YOU FROM THE FATHER, THAT IS THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH WHO PROCEEDS FROM THE FATHER, HE WILL TESTIFY ABOUT ME. (JOHN 15:26) ¹⁰⁸

[*Since* the Day of Pentecost, the believer receives – at the time of salvation – both the Holy Spirit and His power to help him testify of Jesus Christ.]

VI. ABOUT THE CHURCH'S SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

A. Election

63) Those whom the Father gives to His Son will surely be saved

*ALL THAT THE FATHER GIVES ME WILL COME TO ME (JOHN 6:37)*¹⁰⁹

64) Not one person the Father gives to His Son will be rejected by the Son

*ALL THAT THE FATHER GIVES ME WILL COME TO ME, AND THE ONE WHO COMES TO ME, I WILL CERTAINLY NOT CAST OUT. (JOHN 6:37)*¹¹⁰

B. Forgiveness

65) The believer has received full forgiveness of every sin he has ever committed, including derogatory words against God

*TRULY I SAY TO YOU, ALL SINS SHALL BE FORGIVEN THE SONS OF MEN, AND WHATEVER BLASPHEMIES THEY UTTER (MARK 3:28)*¹¹¹

[There is, however, an exception to this promise of forgiveness for blasphemy:

... BUT WHOEVER BLASPHEMES AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT NEVER HAS FORGIVENESS, BUT IS GUILTY OF AN ETERNAL SIN — BECAUSE THEY WERE SAYING, "HE HAS AN UNCLEAN SPIRIT." (MARK 3:29-30)

This sin, to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, is to *attribute the supernatural power of Jesus to the demonic realm*. But how could this sin be “unforgiveable”?

Those who heard these words of condemnation (“the scribes” 3:22) had rejected *every proof* Jesus had presented to them regarding His deity and Messiahship: (1) the *Scriptures*, (2) His *sinless life*, (3) His *words*, and (4) His *miracles*. Thus, their accusation that Jesus was demon-possessed was not based on insufficient evidence; it was based on their unwillingness to believe the *abundant* evidence they had witnessed firsthand.

Indeed, no additional proof (not even His resurrection, Luke 16:19-31, especially vs. 31) would change *the will* of those who preferred darkness over *the highest level of light*. Their defiant rejection of Christ had hardened their hearts to the point where repentance and forgiveness were impossible. They had sealed themselves in an eternal destiny of death.

Could blasphemy against the Holy Spirit be committed today? It is likely that committing this sin was limited to those who *witnessed firsthand* the Spirit-empowered life, teaching, and miracles of Jesus. If that is correct, then no, this sin could not be committed today. But there is a sin closely akin to this one that *can* be committed today; and it is just as dangerous.

Bible study is risky business. The more Truth one knows, the more responsible he becomes (Mark 4:24-25). If one persists in his defiant rejection of what God's Word says about God's Son, he, too, will grow progressively calloused to the light he has received ... or might later receive. (His capacity to repent and believe God's Word decreases each time he refuses to accept this written witness of the Spirit of God.) He, too, is gradually sealing himself in an eternal destiny of death.]

66) God accepts the believer, entitling him to be admitted into eternal glory

*TO HIM WHO OVERCOMES, TO HIM I WILL GIVE ... A WHITE STONE AND A NEW NAME WRITTEN ON THE STONE WHICH NO ONE KNOWS BUT HE WHO RECEIVES IT. (REVELATION 2:17)*¹¹²

[*"He who overcomes."* One "who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." That is, he believes that Jesus is God, that the Father sent Him to serve as "the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world," and that His Sacrifice is the payment for *his* sins. The overcomer is one who is saved (1st John 5:4-5).]

[*"white stone"*: this may refer to an early custom of voting for the *acquittal* of an accused person (using "a white stone" to do so), thereby giving him *his "right of admission" into eternal glory.*

[This "new name written on the stone" is the personal identification of each one Christ loves, indicating his acceptance by God. It is known only to God and the one who receives it, indicating an exceedingly close, personal relationship between the two.]

C. Deliverance from Eternal Death

67) God will grant the believer deliverance from eternal death (unto eternal life)

*FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. (JOHN 3:16)*¹¹³

[*"whoever believes in."* That is, anyone who depends upon the death of the resurrected Son of God to serve as payment for the death sentence that he, a sinner, is under. This is the one and only requirement to receive this promised deliverance from eternal death to eternal life: faith. Belief in Him.]

[*Evidence* that one has, indeed, placed his faith in Jesus Christ is a life that (gradually) displays a separation from its former sinful patterns of behavior, becoming increasingly Christlike in purity and righteousness (James 2:14-20). This spiritual growth is not the *cause* of salvation. Rather, it is the *proof* that salvation has already taken place.]

TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, HE WHO HEARS MY WORD, AND BELIEVES HIM WHO SENT ME, HAS ETERNAL LIFE, AND DOES NOT COME INTO JUDGMENT, BUT HAS PASSED OUT OF DEATH INTO LIFE. (JOHN 5:24) ¹¹⁴

[“*does not come into judgment.*” That is, God will never condemn believers (He will never punish them for their *sins*) since Jesus took that punishment upon Himself (Romans 8:1).]

[Believers *do*, however, face a judgment regarding their *stewardship*. This will take place at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1st Corinthians 3:10-15). There, the Lord Jesus will evaluate the *quality* of their service to Him and the *motives* behind their service (1st Corinthians 4:1-5). He will reward them for their faithfulness; but for unfaithfulness, they will suffer a loss of rewards (yet remain saved) (1st Corinthians 3:14-15).]

TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, IF ANYONE KEEPS MY WORD, HE WILL NEVER SEE DEATH. (JOHN 8:51) ¹¹⁵

[“*if anyone keeps My Word.*” Salvation is by faith alone. But there are *two kinds* of faith; and one of them does not save: (1) A *man*-generated faith is a dead faith that can produce only dead works. It cannot save. (2) A *God*-generated faith is a living faith that produces good works. This is the only kind of faith that saves, one that produces an obedient life. To be clear: Salvation is not by faith *plus* works. Salvation is by faith alone. But it is by a *living* faith ... a faith *that* works (James 2:14-26).]

[“*will never see death.*” A believer may experience *physical* death (the state in which his soul has separated from his *body*); but he will never experience *spiritual* death (the state in which his soul is eternally separated from *God*). At his conversion, he received eternal life.]

I AM THE DOOR; IF ANYONE ENTERS THROUGH ME, HE WILL BE SAVED AND WILL GO IN AND OUT AND FIND PASTURE. (JOHN 10:9) ¹¹⁶

[“*the Door.*” Christ is not “*a*” door (that is, one of several doors). He is “*the Door,*” that is, the one and only Way to have a relationship with God the Father.]

“I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, THE LIFE; NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER BUT THROUGH ME.” (JOHN 14:6)

[“*he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.*” Jesus Christ is the only means by Whom one can be saved from eternal death and partake of God’s blessings (“pasture”) of eternal life.]

EVERYONE WHO LIVES AND BELIEVES IN ME WILL NEVER DIE. DO YOU BELIEVE THIS? (JOHN 11:26) ¹¹⁷

[*“will never die.”* The believer will never die spiritually (that is, his soul will never be separated from God) because he now has eternal life.]

AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED. (ACTS 2:21) ¹¹⁸

WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED. (ROMANS 10:13) ¹¹⁹

[*“call on the name of the Lord.”* To call on the Lord means to pray in faith for salvation through Christ’s work on the cross.]

IF YOU CONFESS WITH YOUR MOUTH JESUS AS LORD AND BELIEVE IN YOUR HEART THAT GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD, YOU WILL BE SAVED. (ROMANS 10:9) ¹²⁰

[*“confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord.”* Salvation comes through acknowledging to God that Jesus Christ is God and ...]

[*“believe ... that God raised Him from the dead.”* Belief in the resurrection is necessary for salvation because it proved that Christ is who He claimed to be, namely, the Son of God (Romans 1:3-4), and that the Father had accepted His sacrifice in the place of sinners. Without the resurrection, there is no salvation. Taken from the *MacArthur Study Bible*, MacArthur, John, footnote: Romans 10:9]

HE WHO OVERCOMES WILL NOT BE HURT BY THE SECOND DEATH. (REVELATION 2:11) ¹²¹

[*“He who overcomes.”* One “who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” That is, he believes that Jesus is God, that the Father sent Him to serve as “the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world,” and that His Sacrifice is the payment for *his* sins. The overcomer is one who is saved (1st John 5:4-5).]

[*“will not be hurt by the second death.”* God will deliver the believer from eternal death in the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14).]

D. Justification

68) Those who trust in Christ for salvation with a living faith will be “declared righteous” (justified) by God

GOD, WHO WILL JUSTIFY THE CIRCUMCISED (THE JEW) BY FAITH AND THE UNCIRCUMCISED (THE GENTILE) THROUGH FAITH, IS ONE. (ROMANS 3:30) ¹²²

[*“Faith.”* For one to receive eternal life, he must possess the righteousness of *God*. (The righteousness of *man* is imperfect; it cannot save.) According to Romans 3:20 and Philippians 3:8-9, one receives God’s righteousness by faith, not by works of the Law. (The

only righteousness God accepts is a faith-based righteousness, not a works-based righteousness.) God will save all who come to Him by faith, Jew and Gentile alike.]

*IT IS NOT THE HEARERS OF THE LAW WHO ARE JUST BEFORE GOD, BUT THE DOERS OF THE LAW WILL BE JUSTIFIED. (ROMANS 2:13)*¹²³

[A person is not saved by his good works. Salvation is by faith ... and faith alone. But according to the Bible, there are two kinds of faith: one that saves and one that does not. The faith that does *not* save is described as a “dead” faith (James 2:14-17). That is, it has no lasting effect upon one’s life. On the other hand, the faith that *does* save is a “living” faith (James 2:18), *one that motivates and empowers the believer to obey God*. Those who believe and obey God’s Word are not saved by faith *plus* works; they are saved by the faith *that* works. Their works prove that the faith they have is the kind of faith that saves. Therefore, *works vindicate one’s claim to “have faith.”* And it is by this living faith that they are “declared righteous” by God.]

E. The Gift of Eternal Life

69) The one who trusts in Christ for salvation will receive the gift of eternal life

*HE WHO BELIEVES IN THE SON HAS ETERNAL LIFE (JOHN 3:36A)*¹²⁴

*AS MOSES LIFTED UP THE SERPENT IN THE WILDERNESS, EVEN SO MUST THE SON OF MAN BE LIFTED UP; SO THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES WILL IN HIM HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. (JOHN 3:14-15)*¹²⁵

[“*the Son of Man be lifted up.*” A reference to the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ as He was “lifted up” on the cross. Those who look to Him in faith will be rescued from eternal death and receive eternal life. (This takes place when those who are condemned to die depend upon His death to serve as payment for *their* deadly sins and His resurrection to be the guarantee of their own life-giving resurrection).]

*WHOEVER DRINKS OF THE WATER THAT I WILL GIVE HIM SHALL NEVER THIRST; BUT THE WATER THAT I WILL GIVE HIM WILL BECOME IN HIM A WELL OF WATER SPRINGING UP TO ETERNAL LIFE. (JOHN 4:14)*¹²⁶

[“*the water that I will give him.*” A reference to eternal life (through faith in Christ).]

[“*Whoever drinks ... shall never thirst.*” To the one who receives eternal life, Christ will give spiritual refreshment (by the indwelling Holy Spirit), continually satisfying the true longings of one’s mind, heart, and soul.]

[“*will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.*” The one who receives eternal life will become a “channel of salvation,” allowing God to offer eternal life to others through him.]

*FOR THIS IS THE WILL OF MY FATHER, THAT EVERYONE WHO BEHOLDS THE SON AND BELIEVES IN HIM WILL HAVE ETERNAL LIFE, AND I MYSELF WILL RAISE HIM UP ON THE LAST DAY. (JOHN 6:40)*¹²⁷

[“Everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him.” This generation of racial Israel (alive during the public ministry of Jesus Christ) had the tremendous privilege of observing the perfect life and powerful miracles of Jesus. Nevertheless, most still refused to believe in Him. (“Beholding the Son” does not necessarily lead to salvation.) The promise of eternal life is for all who “believe in Him,” whether they see His works or not.]

*I AM THE LIVING BREAD THAT CAME DOWN OUT OF HEAVEN; IF ANYONE EATS OF THIS BREAD, HE WILL LIVE FOREVER; AND THE BREAD ALSO WHICH I WILL GIVE FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD IS MY FLESH. (JOHN 6:51)*¹²⁸

[“I am the living Bread.” Jesus likens Himself to the life-giving manna (bread) provided by God to sustain Israel in the wilderness after their departure from Egypt.]

[“the bread ... is My flesh.” As manna was the physical sustenance used by God to give life to His people, the physical body of Christ (His “flesh”) was used by God to give eternal life to those who receive this offering by faith.]

[“If anyone eats of this bread.” To the one who receives (by faith) Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross, God promises to give eternal life (“he will live forever”).]

*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. (JOHN 6:54-55)*¹²⁹

[“Eats My flesh and drinks My blood.” This is not a reference to accepting the elements of Communion. Just as eating and drinking are necessary for *physical* life, **accepting – by faith** – Christ’s sacrificial death on the Cross is necessary for *eternal* life. When an individual places his faith in the Savior, he receives (that very moment) eternal life. (One’s eternal life does not begin at death; rather, it begins at salvation.)

*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 6:57-58)*¹³⁰

[“He who eats Me ... will live.” That is, “He who believes upon Me.” He who accepts – by faith – the Father’s provision for eternal life (namely, His Son’s sacrificial death on the cross) “will live because of Me (Christ).” God’s provision of His Son (“the Bread which came down out of heaven”) is superior to His provision of wilderness manna that “the fathers ate.” That bread did not keep Israel alive, for they “died.” But those who eat “the Bread which came down out of heaven ... will live forever.”]

*JESUS SAID TO HER, "I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE; HE WHO BELIEVES IN ME WILL LIVE EVEN IF HE DIES." (JOHN 11:25)*¹³¹

[“*will live even if he dies.*” Even though he may die physically, the one who trusts in Jesus Christ for salvation will never die spiritually but, instead, receives – that very moment – eternal life. (One’s eternal life does not begin at death; rather, it begins at salvation.)]

F. Evidence of Possessing Eternal Life

70) The one who lays aside his self-interests and submits his life, instead, to serving Christ and the Gospel (a supernatural work of the indwelling Spirit of God) *validates* his possession of eternal life

*FOR WHOEVER WISHES TO SAVE HIS LIFE WILL LOSE IT, BUT WHOEVER LOSES HIS LIFE FOR MY SAKE AND THE GOSPEL'S WILL SAVE IT. FOR WHAT DOES IT PROFIT A MAN TO GAIN THE WHOLE WORLD, AND FORFEIT HIS SOUL? FOR WHAT WILL A MAN GIVE IN EXCHANGE FOR HIS SOUL? (MARK 8:35-37)*¹³²

[Aware of his deadly plight and knowing that he cannot save himself, the repentant sinner desperately “grabs hold of” (through faith) his only hope, Jesus Christ. This results in his salvation. Afterwards, over time, as he seeks to give more of himself to his Savior, he gladly lays aside – one by one – his self-interests (“his life”), even to the point of martyrdom. With overflowing gratitude, this maturing believer holds nothing back (of which he is aware). This submission of his will to the will of Christ (a supernatural work of the indwelling Spirit of God) *validates* his possession of eternal life.]

*JESUS SAID, "TRULY I SAY TO YOU, THERE IS NO ONE WHO HAS LEFT HOUSE OR BROTHERS OR SISTERS OR MOTHER OR FATHER OR CHILDREN OR FARMS, FOR MY SAKE AND FOR THE GOSPEL'S SAKE, BUT THAT HE WILL RECEIVE ... ETERNAL LIFE." (MARK 10:29-30)*¹³³

[With overflowing gratitude for his salvation, the believer gladly lays aside – one by one – his self-interests. Nothing (of which he is aware) is held back. These forfeitures do not save him. They *prove* that he is in a right relationship with God by faith in Christ.]

*HE WHO LOVES HIS LIFE LOSES IT, AND HE WHO HATES HIS LIFE IN THIS WORLD WILL KEEP IT TO LIFE ETERNAL. (JOHN 12:25)*¹³⁴

[“*he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal.*” *Eternal life* is not *earned* by sacrificial service. God gives eternal life to those who depend upon the death of Christ to serve as payment for their sins. If that faith is genuine, it will cause the true believer to gladly die to self-centered interests and to live, instead, for the interests of Christ. To “*hate his life in this world*” (a supernatural work of the indwelling Spirit of God) is *evidence* that he possesses eternal life.]

- 71) The one who does not struggle with the sins of which he is aware but, instead, *practices* a lifestyle of disobedience and unrepentance will suffer under the penalty of God's sentence of eternal death**

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) ¹³⁵

[“*he who does not obey the Son will not see life.*” One does not obtain salvation *by means* of obedience. Salvation is by faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). But according to the Bible, there are *two kinds* of faith; and one of them does not save: (1) A *man-generated* faith is a dead faith that can produce only dead works. It cannot save. (2) A *God-generated* faith is a living faith that produces good works. This is the only *kind* of faith that saves, one that produces a *changing* life.]

[A profession of faith does not *prove* that salvation has taken place. The evidence of one's rebirth is found in his *struggle* to turn from a sinful lifestyle toward a righteous lifestyle. (He is not satisfied with the status quo of his spiritual life.) Although he knows he will never be perfect in this life, he, nevertheless, strives to be Christlike. If his sin does not bother him, there is reason to be concerned about his salvation.]

IF YOU ARE LIVING ACCORDING TO THE FLESH, YOU MUST DIE (ROMANS 8:13) ¹³⁶

[This does not refer to a temporary lapse into sin. This refers to a habitual lifestyle of sin, one in which there is *no struggle* to stop the sins of which the individual is aware. *Contentment* with the status quo of one's sinful lifestyle is evidence of being unregenerate.]

- 72) God will reject the one who abandons the faith he once professed to have**

IF WE DENY HIM, HE ALSO WILL DENY US. (2ND TIMOTHY 2:12) ¹³⁷

[This does not refer to a *loss* of salvation. *For one to deny the faith is proof that he had never been saved to begin with* (Matthew 10:32-33; 1st John 2:19). (Perseverance is a work of the indwelling Spirit of God. For one to remain steadfast in the faith is evidence of the rebirth.))

G. Eternal Security

- 73) The believer will never lose his salvation but will, instead, be forever secure in his eternal life**

BLESSED BE THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, WHO ACCORDING TO HIS GREAT MERCY 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. (1ST PETER 1:3-5) ¹³⁸

I GIVE ETERNAL LIFE TO THEM, AND THEY WILL NEVER PERISH; AND NO ONE WILL SNATCH THEM OUT OF MY HAND. MY FATHER, WHO HAS GIVEN THEM TO ME, IS GREATER THAN ALL; AND NO ONE IS ABLE TO SNATCH THEM OUT OF THE FATHER'S HAND. (JOHN 10:28-29) ¹³⁹

[“No one will snatch (those who have received eternal life) out of My hand ... no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.” The eternal security of a believer’s salvation is not dependent on his frail ability to hold on to it (by a less-than-perfect obedience). The omnipotent power of the Son and the Father safeguard one’s salvation. Its permanence is maintained, not by man but by God.]

HE WHO OVERCOMES ... I WILL NOT ERASE HIS NAME FROM THE BOOK OF LIFE. (REVELATION 3:5) ¹⁴⁰

[“He who overcomes.” One “who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” That is, he believes that Jesus is God, that the Father sent Him to serve as “the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world,” and that His Sacrifice is the payment for *his* sins. The overcomer is one who is saved (1st John 5:4-5).]

[“will not erase his name from the book of life.” His name will forever remain recorded in “the Book of Life of the Lamb Who was slain.”]

74) “The Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” will grant the believer an eternally secure place in His presence

HE WHO OVERCOMES, I WILL MAKE HIM A PILLAR IN THE TEMPLE OF MY GOD, AND HE WILL NOT GO OUT FROM IT ANYMORE. (REVELATION 3:12) ¹⁴¹

[“He who overcomes.” One “who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” That is, he believes that Jesus is God, that the Father sent Him to serve as “the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world,” and that His Sacrifice is the payment for *his* sins. The overcomer is one who is saved (1st John 5:4-5).]

[“will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore.” He will enjoy an eternally secure place in the presence of God (see Revelation 21:22).]

75) Even though the believer struggles with disobedience and weakness, Christ will not disown him

IF WE ARE FAITHLESS, HE REMAINS FAITHFUL, FOR HE CANNOT DENY HIMSELF. (2ND TIMOTHY 2:13) ¹⁴²

[This verse is not about one who departs from *the faith* because his profession to know Christ is false (because his faith is “dead”). This verse refers to a *true* believer who fails, at times, to live victoriously in the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ will not disown him. His salvation remains eternally secure. Christ’s faithfulness to His children is not dependent on their perfect faithfulness to Him.]

H. Blessings (Temporal and Eternal)

76) The one who rightly responds to the Word of God will be blessed by God and will be a blessing to others

*FOR GROUND THAT DRINKS THE RAIN WHICH OFTEN FALLS ON IT AND BRINGS FORTH VEGETATION USEFUL TO THOSE FOR WHOSE SAKE IT IS ALSO TILLED, RECEIVES A BLESSING FROM GOD. (HEBREWS 6:7)*¹⁴³

[“*ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it.*” An illustration describing *believers* who receive (that is, believe and obey) the Word of God.]

[“*and brings forth vegetation.*” Those who believe and obey God’s Word will bear the fruit of purity and righteousness.]

[“*it is also tilled.*” To be effective in their service to others, believers must also be cultivated (disciplined, pruned), which is what these Jewish believers were going through.]

[“*useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled.*” This preparation will make them an asset to God’s people.]

[“*receives a blessing from God.*” The believer who responds to the Word of God with faith and obedience is promised to be given great blessings *in this life*: (1) His capacity to understand God’s Word will be expanded, increasing his ability to discern spiritual truths. (2) Furthermore, his life’s witness will become stronger, consistent, and fruitful. (3) Because his witness was mature, faithful and fruitful, he will experience great honor *throughout eternity* as he shares in Christ’s radiant glory.]

BUT ONE WHO LOOKS INTENTLY AT THE PERFECT LAW, THE LAW OF LIBERTY, AND ABIDES BY IT, NOT HAVING BECOME A FORGETFUL HEARER BUT AN EFFECTUAL DOER, THIS MAN WILL BE BLESSED IN WHAT HE DOES.
(JAMES 1:25)¹⁴⁴

[“*the perfect law, the law of liberty.*” This would now refer to *the entire Bible*, though at the time this letter of James was written, the Church recognized only the Old Testament and the recorded teachings of Christ as having the authority of “the Word of God.”]

[“*this man will be blessed in what he does.*” God will bless the believer who responds to the Word of God with faith and obedience. His witness will become stronger, more consistent, and fruitful.]

77) The believer will receive spiritual blessings from God the Father and God the Son

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE WILL BE WITH US, FROM GOD THE FATHER AND FROM JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF THE FATHER, IN TRUTH AND LOVE. (2ND JOHN 1:3) ¹⁴⁵

78) In this life God will bless many times over the believer who lays aside his own self-interests and pursuits to advance the Name and Kingdom of Christ

JESUS SAID, "TRULY I SAY TO YOU, THERE IS NO ONE WHO HAS LEFT HOUSE OR BROTHERS OR SISTERS OR MOTHER OR FATHER OR CHILDREN OR FARMS, FOR MY SAKE AND FOR THE GOSPEL'S SAKE, BUT THAT HE WILL RECEIVE A HUNDRED TIMES AS MUCH NOW IN THE PRESENT AGE, HOUSES AND BROTHERS AND SISTERS AND MOTHERS AND CHILDREN AND FARMS" (MARK 10:29-30) ¹⁴⁶

[The disciple's *purpose* in forfeiting "his own self-interests and pursuits" should not be to receive back "one hundred times as much" of what he gave up. His submission to the Father's will is not for his own sake but "for My sake (Christ's Name) and for the Gospel's sake" (Christ's Kingdom). This should be his motive whether he receives anything in return for doing so or not. Nevertheless, the grace of God is magnanimous, promising to give His Christ-centered servant "one hundred times" the blessings he had sacrificed in his service to the King.]

I. Heir of God / Joint Heir with Christ**79) As heirs of God, believers will share in His inheritance**

THE SPIRIT HIMSELF TESTIFIES WITH OUR SPIRIT THAT WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD, 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 8:16-17) ¹⁴⁷

[*"Heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ."* God has appointed His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to be "heir of all things" (Hebrews 1:2). By His grace God promises that all His children (believers) will share in Christ's inheritance.]

[*"if indeed we suffer with Him."* Proof that one will receive this inheritance is that he shares in the sufferings of Christ *because of his identification with Christ* (2nd Corinthians 4:17; Philippians 3:8-11; 2nd Timothy 3:12).]

80) The believer's inheritance is reserved for him in heaven

BLESSED BE THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, WHO ACCORDING TO HIS GREAT MERCY 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. (1ST PETER 1:3-5) ¹⁴⁸

[*“Inheritance.”* This inheritance includes all that God has planned for his legal heirs (his “sons”): (1) a life lived in the fullness of Christ under the complete control of the Holy Spirit, (2) the bodily resurrection unto life, (3) eternal life, (4) a life of perfect holiness (no longer tainted with sin) and perfect righteousness, (5) eternal rewards, (6) reigning with Christ over the nations throughout His 1,000-year reign on this earth, (7) the right to stand in God’s “face-to-Face” Presence, (8) the close companionship of Christ, (9) heavenly citizenship, (10) an eternal priesthood, (11) reigning with Christ over His eternal kingdom on the new earth, (12) sharing in His eternal glory, and (13) perhaps even more that has not yet been revealed to us.]

... THE HOPE LAID UP FOR YOU IN HEAVEN, OF WHICH YOU PREVIOUSLY HEARD IN THE WORD OF TRUTH, THE GOSPEL. (COLOSSIANS 1:5) ¹⁴⁹

[*“hope.”* Generally-speaking, the word “hope” in Scripture refers to one’s confidence – by faith – in what God will do in the future.]

[*“the hope.”* Confidence that God will perform something *specific*. Here, it refers to the believer’s bodily resurrection from the dead unto eternal life (Acts 23:6; 24:15, 20-21; 26:6-8).]

81) As an “heir of the world,” the believer will co-reign with Christ over the nations

FOR THE PROMISE TO ABRAHAM OR TO HIS DESCENDANTS THAT HE WOULD BE HEIR OF THE WORLD WAS NOT THROUGH THE LAW, BUT THROUGH THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH ... FOR THIS REASON, IT IS BY FAITH, IN ORDER THAT IT MAY BE IN ACCORDANCE WITH GRACE, SO THAT THE PROMISE WILL BE GUARANTEED TO ALL THE DESCENDANTS, NOT ONLY TO THOSE WHO ARE OF THE LAW, BUT ALSO TO THOSE WHO ARE OF THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM, WHO IS THE FATHER OF US ALL. (ROMANS 4:13, 16) ¹⁵⁰

[Because he is “in Christ” (having believed in Him with an Abraham-like faith), the New Testament believer (Jew and Gentile alike) will share in the promise given to Abraham, namely that, as “heir of the world,” he will reign with Christ Jesus (1) over the nations throughout His 1,000-year reign on *this* earth (Revelation 20:6) and (2) over His eternal kingdom on the *new* earth (Revelation 22:5). He will “inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:15).]

BLESSED AND HOLY IS THE ONE WHO HAS A PART IN THE FIRST RESURRECTION; OVER THESE THE SECOND DEATH HAS NO POWER, BUT THEY WILL BE PRIESTS OF GOD AND OF CHRIST AND WILL REIGN WITH HIM FOR A THOUSAND YEARS. (REVELATION 20:6; SEE ALSO 2ND TIMOTHY 2:12 AND REVELATION 5:9-10)

AND THERE WILL NO LONGER BE ANY NIGHT; AND THEY WILL NOT HAVE NEED OF THE LIGHT OF A LAMP NOR THE LIGHT OF THE SUN, BECAUSE THE LORD GOD WILL ILLUMINE THEM; AND THEY WILL REIGN FOREVER AND EVER. (REVELATION 22:5)

J. Owned by God

82) Christ will identify the believer as belonging to God

*HE WHO OVERCOMES ... I WILL WRITE ON HIM THE NAME OF MY GOD (REVELATION 3:12)*¹⁵¹

[“*He who overcomes.*” One “who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” That is, he believes that Jesus is God, that the Father sent Him to serve as “the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world,” and that His Sacrifice is the payment for *his* sins. The overcomer is one who is saved (1st John 5:4-5).]

[“*I will write on him the Name of My God.*” This “imprint” of God’s Name marks the believer as the permanent possession of God.]

K. Identified with Christ

83) The believer is completely identified with Christ by means of the Holy Spirit’s baptism

*I BAPTIZED YOU WITH WATER; BUT HE WILL BAPTIZE YOU WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT. (MARK 1:8)*¹⁵²

[“*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*” This baptism with the Spirit of God places the believer “in Christ.” (It is a *positional* truth.) Because he is “in Christ,” the believer is completely identified with Him: His death, His burial, His resurrection, and His exaltation.]

[*Since* the Day of Pentecost, this Holy Spirit baptism takes place the moment of salvation.]

84) Now identified with Christ’s Resurrection (in his position), the believer will walk in newness of life (in his practice)

*FOR IF WE HAVE BECOME UNITED WITH HIM IN THE LIKENESS OF HIS DEATH, CERTAINLY WE SHALL ALSO BE IN THE LIKENESS OF HIS RESURRECTION. (ROMANS 6:5)*¹⁵³

*NOW IF WE HAVE DIED WITH CHRIST, WE BELIEVE THAT WE SHALL ALSO LIVE WITH HIM. (ROMANS 6:8)*¹⁵⁴

[The context of Romans 6 concerns the believer’s *position* in Christ. In these verses God assures believers that, having been crucified and resurrected with Christ (in our *position*), we can now experience a newness of life (in our *practice*), being dead to sin’s authority and power and alive to God.]

IT IS A TRUSTWORTHY STATEMENT: FOR IF WE DIED WITH HIM, WE WILL ALSO LIVE WITH HIM.
(2ND TIMOTHY 2:11) ¹⁵⁵

[“*we will also live with Him.*” Because the verb in this verse (and in the two verses above: Romans 6:5 and 6:8) is in the future tense, this could also refer to living in the presence of Christ throughout eternity. Therefore, this *positional* truth can – and will – affect the believer *practically* during his *present* years on earth and in the *future* throughout eternity.]

85) Writing His new name upon each believer, the Son of God will identify him as His permanent possession

HE WHO OVERCOMES ... I WILL WRITE ON HIM ... MY NEW NAME. (REVELATION 3:12) ¹⁵⁶

[“*He who overcomes.*” One “who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” That is, he believes that Jesus is God, that the Father sent Him to serve as “the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world,” and that His Sacrifice is the payment for *his* sins. The overcomer is one who is saved (1st John 5:4-5).]

[“*I will write on him ... My new Name.*” In the future Christ will write His new name on each believer, identifying him as the Son of God’s permanent possession.]

L. Spiritual Nourishment

86) The all-sufficient Christ will give the believer His spiritual nourishment and strength

TO HIM WHO OVERCOMES, TO HIM I WILL GIVE SOME OF THE HIDDEN MANNA. (REVELATION 2:17) ¹⁵⁷

[“*He who overcomes.*” One “who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” That is, he believes that Jesus is God, that the Father sent Him to serve as “the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world,” and that His Sacrifice is the payment for *his* sins. The overcomer is one who is saved (1st John 5:4-5).]

[“*the hidden manna.*” Jesus Christ is “the Living Bread that came down out of Heaven.” (John 6:48-51)]

[“*to him I will give some of the hidden manna.*” Jesus Christ, the all-sufficient “Bread from heaven,” will nourish and strengthen the believer, both now and throughout eternity.]

M. Progressive Sanctification

87) God will give the believer everything he needs to cultivate his spiritual maturity

HE WHO DID NOT SPARE HIS OWN SON, BUT DELIVERED HIM OVER FOR US ALL, HOW WILL HE NOT ALSO WITH HIM FREELY GIVE US ALL THINGS? (ROMANS 8:32) ¹⁵⁸

[“*all things.*” The context of this passage (Romans 8:26-32) concerns the believer being “conformed to the image of His Son” (verse 29). Everything the Christ-follower needs for this transformation to take place, God will give to him.]

88) The believer will progressively experience deliverance from sin’s authority and power until the Son of God returns for His Church (at which time the believer’s sanctification will be completed)

FOR I AM CONFIDENT OF THIS VERY THING, THAT HE WHO BEGAN A GOOD WORK IN YOU WILL PERFECT IT UNTIL THE DAY OF CHRIST JESUS. (PHILIPPIANS 1:6) ¹⁵⁹

[“*began a good work in you.*” Refers to the moment of one’s salvation from eternal death unto eternal life (justification).]

[“*until the day of Christ Jesus.*” The “day” when God perfects the believer’s sanctification, glorifies his body, and rewards His servant for his faithful stewardship at the Judgment Seat of Christ, all of which *commences* when he meets Christ face-to-Face.]

NOW MAY THE GOD OF PEACE HIMSELF SANCTIFY YOU ENTIRELY; AND MAY YOUR SPIRIT AND SOUL AND BODY BE PRESERVED COMPLETE, WITHOUT BLAME AT THE COMING OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. FAITHFUL IS HE WHO CALLS YOU, AND HE ALSO WILL BRING IT TO PASS. (1ST THESSALONIANS 5:23-24) ¹⁶⁰

[“*may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely.*” Only God has the power to separate the believer *from sin unto* purity. Nevertheless, the believer has a part to play in this lifelong process of “working out his salvation” (Philippians 2:12-13). During that time, his “progressive sanctification” (his daily *practice*) becomes increasingly like his “completed sanctification” (his already-accomplished *position*).]

[“*your spirit and soul and body.*” This does not mean that a human is composed of three parts. The words “spirit” and “soul” are used interchangeably throughout Scripture. This is a way to emphasize the word “entirely” (verse 23). “Spirit and soul and body” means “the whole person.”]

89) God will use everything in the believer's life to conform him to the image of Christ

*AND WE KNOW THAT GOD CAUSES ALL THINGS TO WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THOSE WHO LOVE GOD, TO THOSE WHO ARE CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE. FOR THOSE WHOM HE FOREKNEW, HE ALSO PREDESTINED TO BECOME CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON, SO THAT HE WOULD BE THE FIRSTBORN AMONG MANY BRETHREN; AND THESE WHOM HE PREDESTINED, HE ALSO CALLED; AND THESE WHOM HE CALLED, HE ALSO JUSTIFIED; AND THESE WHOM HE JUSTIFIED, HE ALSO GLORIFIED. (ROMANS 8:28-30)*¹⁶¹

[“for good.” Verse 29 defines the word “good” of verse 28 to mean: “to become conformed to the image of His Son.” Every detail of our lives – including temptations, suffering, successes, and failures – contributes to our being “sculpted” into the likeness of Christ. This is the promise. Then, at the Appearing of Christ (at the Rapture of the Church), this process of sanctification will be immediately and fully completed. (We will be “glorified.”)]

VII. ABOUT THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO SIN

A. Confrontation of Sins

- 90) **The Lord Jesus will provide wisdom and guidance to those believers who seek to restore an erring brother through biblical (church) discipline**

FOR WHERE TWO OR THREE HAVE GATHERED TOGETHER IN MY NAME, I AM THERE IN THEIR MIDST.
(MATTHEW 18:20) ¹⁶²

[“*where two or three have gathered together in My Name.*” Matthew 18:20 does not give the minimum number of believers that must come together (1) before the Lord agrees to meet with them or (2) before He considers their assembly to be a legitimate prayer meeting or (3) before He agrees to answer their prayers.]

[The context of Matthew 18:15-20 lists the steps a believer / the church is to take when conducting biblical discipline (church discipline). Verses 15-16 is an exhortation to keep the sin of an erring brother or sister as private as possible (starting with one person and then, *if needed*, “one or two more”). If the erring one does not listen to their appeal for repentance, his situation is to be taken to the church, first to its leadership (Galatians 6:1) and then, *if needed*, before the entire church.]

[“*I am there in their midst.*” The promise of verse 20 is to those who are involved in the process of restoring this unrepentant believer. These are the “two or three (who) have gathered together in My name.” They have gathered *to seek God’s wisdom in knowing how to address this matter.* Verse 20 is the Lord’s promise to give them that guidance.]

- 91) **The believer who restores an erring brother back to a lifestyle of faith and obedience will deliver the repentant one from the consequences of his severed fellowship with God**

MY BRETHREN, IF ANY AMONG YOU STRAYS FROM THE TRUTH AND ONE TURNS HIM BACK, LET HIM KNOW THAT HE WHO TURNS A SINNER FROM THE ERROR OF HIS WAY WILL SAVE HIS SOUL FROM DEATH (JAMES 5:19-20) ¹⁶³

[“*he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death.*” These two verses do not pertain to evangelism. They are not about the redemption of a lost person; nor do they refer to a believer’s loss of salvation.]

[These verses have to do with the *restoration* of a believer. The ministry in view concerns the revival of one who has grown weary in his spiritual walk. The one who helps his wayward brother return to a life of faith and obedience is assured that he has delivered his soul “from death,” that is, from his severed fellowship with God, from spiritual uselessness, and from loss of eternal reward.]

- 92) The believer who restores an erring brother back to a lifestyle of faith and obedience will help him experience his forgiveness in Christ**

*MY BRETHREN, IF ANY AMONG YOU STRAYS FROM THE TRUTH AND ONE TURNS HIM BACK, LET HIM KNOW THAT HE WHO TURNS A SINNER FROM THE ERROR OF HIS WAY ... WILL COVER A MULTITUDE OF SINS. (JAMES 5:19-20)*¹⁶⁴

[“he who turns a sinner from the error of his way ... will cover a multitude of sins.” Notice that the “sinner” is someone from *among* the “brethren.” That is, he / she is a brother / sister in Christ. Restoring a wayward believer will enable him to *experience* his “full and forever” forgiveness he received at his conversion.]

B. Confession of Sins

- 93) Two believers who disclose their spiritual struggles to one another and commit themselves to pray for each other will experience deliverance from spiritual weakness and defeat**

*THEREFORE, CONFESS YOUR SINS TO ONE ANOTHER AND PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER SO THAT YOU MAY BE HEALED. THE EFFECTIVE PRAYER OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN CAN ACCOMPLISH MUCH. (JAMES 5:16)*¹⁶⁵

[The above verse does not pertain to church discipline. Nor is this a general exhortation for individuals to openly air their sins before the entire church. In fact, this passage encourages just the opposite.]

[“to one another ... for one another.” These confessions involve private, one-on-one acts of accountability, each reaching out to his fellow brother in Christ (or her fellow sister in Christ) to provide support in his / her struggle with a personal sin. As the two confess their sins to each other and pray for each other, they will experience deliverance from spiritual weakness and defeat.]

[Great personal damage can be avoided if one takes care in the selection of his accountability partner. Each confidant should

- (1) be spiritually mature
- (2) be well-versed in the Scriptures to provide the other with God’s wisdom
- (3) have a healthy self-esteem, committed to protecting the other person’s sensitive information
- (4) be known for having a strong prayer life
- (5) be of the same gender.]

- 94) The believer who confesses to (“agrees with”) God that he has sinned against Him will experience the forgiveness he received at his conversion**

IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS FAITHFUL AND RIGHTEOUS TO FORGIVE US OUR SINS AND TO CLEANSE US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS. (1ST JOHN 1:9) ¹⁶⁶

[“to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” The Apostle John wrote this letter to those who were already believers. (Its purpose is not evangelistic.) The moment a person is saved, he receives a full and forever pardon (forgiveness) from God. From that point on his sins are “remembered no more” (Hebrews 8:12, 10:16-17). But to *experience* the blessing of his forgiveness (versus carrying around guilt), he must confess the sin (and depend upon the Holy Spirit to empower him to turn away from it).]

C. Consequences of Sin

- 95) The believer who continually yields to his flesh’s self-centered cravings will progressively become corrupt in character, defeated, and useless**

DO NOT BE DECEIVED, GOD IS NOT MOCKED; FOR WHATEVER A MAN SOWS, THIS HE WILL ALSO REAP. FOR THE ONE WHO SOWS TO HIS OWN FLESH WILL FROM THE FLESH REAP CORRUPTION (GALATIANS 6:7-8) ¹⁶⁷

[“whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.” It is the “sower” that determines his own harvest. It is not God. Nor is it anyone else. It is the sower.]

[The context of this principle concerns the financial support of Christian laborers in the Galatian churches. If a believer spends his money to satisfy the cravings of his body, his life will be defiled and useless.]

[A broader application, however, is legitimate. If one indulges his fleshly cravings, allowing sin to go unchecked, his character becomes progressively corrupt, weakened, and useless.]

[See below (promise # **198**, Galatians 6:8) for the positive side of this principle.]

- 96) The one who contributes to the demise of a local church – believer or unbeliever – will receive severe discipline from God**

IF ANY MAN DESTROYS THE TEMPLE OF GOD, GOD WILL DESTROY HIM, FOR THE TEMPLE OF GOD IS HOLY, AND THAT IS WHAT YOU ARE. (1ST CORINTHIANS 3:17) ¹⁶⁸

VIII. ABOUT THE CHURCH'S SPIRITUAL LIFE

A. An Abundant Life

- 97) **God will bless the one who trusts in Christ for salvation with a multitude of priceless, eternal riches**

THE SCRIPTURE SAYS, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." (ROMANS 10:11) ¹⁶⁹

[*"whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed"* For those who believe the Gospel, Christ is both the means of salvation and the source of a multitude of priceless, eternal riches.]

JUST AS IT IS WRITTEN, "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." (ROMANS 9:33) ¹⁷⁰

[*"Just as it is written."* The prophet Isaiah had predicted that Israel would reject God's Messiah:

IT IS THE LORD OF HOSTS WHOM YOU SHOULD REGARD AS HOLY ... BUT TO BOTH THE HOUSES OF ISRAEL (ISRAEL AND JUDAH), A STONE TO STRIKE AND A ROCK TO STUMBLE OVER, AND A SNARE AND A TRAP FOR THE INHABITANTS OF JERUSALEM. (ISAIAH 8:13-14, PARENTHESIS ADDED)]

[*"a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense."* Many Jews refused to admit their inability to obey the Mosaic Law perfectly. Instead, they continued to pursue righteousness by their own efforts. (That is, they held to a *works*-based righteousness instead of a *faith*-based righteousness.) As a result, they rejected Jesus Christ as their means of receiving God's righteousness (by grace). They "stumbled over" the Son of God ("a stone ... a rock"), offended by His claim to be "the Way" to God (versus obedience to the Law of Moses being "the way"). Therefore, they remained in their sins.]

[For those who reject the Gospel, this "Stone ... Rock" (Jesus Christ) is God's Agent of judgment.]

FOR THIS IS CONTAINED IN SCRIPTURE: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER STONE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." (1ST PETER 2:6) ¹⁷¹

[*"this is contained in Scripture:*

THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED HAS BECOME THE CHIEF CORNER STONE. THIS IS THE LORD'S DOING; IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES. (PSALM 118:22-23)

THEREFORE THUS SAYS THE LORD GOD, "BEHOLD, I AM LAYING IN ZION A STONE, A TESTED STONE, A COSTLY CORNERSTONE FOR THE FOUNDATION, FIRMLY PLACED. HE WHO BELIEVES IN IT WILL NOT BE DISTURBED. (ISAIAH 28:16)]

[*"a choice stone, a precious corner stone."* The most important stone of a building, the corner stone squared the building.]

[*"he who believes in Him will not be disappointed"* For those who believe the Gospel, Christ is the means of salvation and the source of a multitude of priceless, eternal riches.]

98) The one who trusts in Christ for salvation will be able to experience an abundant life

JESUS SAID TO THEM, "I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE; HE WHO COMES TO ME WILL NOT HUNGER, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN ME WILL NEVER THIRST." (JOHN 6:35) ¹⁷²

[*"I am the bread of Life."* God provided Israel with bread (manna) to nourish them during the 40 years they wandered in the wilderness. That bread was a physical, temporary, and meager "shadow" of what God would provide humanity through His Son. As "the Bread of life," Jesus provides spiritual, eternal, and abundant nourishment for the one who believes in Him.]

[*"he who believes in Me will never thirst."* Again, Jesus is the fulfillment of what was foreshadowed by the water provided to Israel in the wilderness when Moses struck the rock. As with the manna, that water was a physical, temporary, and meager "shadow" of what God would provide mankind through His Son. The one who believes in Him will never suffer from spiritual thirst again.]

NOW ON THE LAST DAY, THE GREAT DAY OF THE FEAST, JESUS STOOD AND CRIED OUT, SAYING, "IF ANYONE IS THIRSTY, LET HIM COME TO ME AND DRINK. HE WHO BELIEVES IN ME, AS THE SCRIPTURE SAID, 'FROM HIS INNERMOST BEING WILL FLOW RIVERS OF LIVING WATER.'" (JOHN 7:37-38) ¹⁷³

[*"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink."* The soul of the one who is "thirsty" longs to be refreshed with spiritual life. The "living water" that Jesus offers is spiritual, abundant, and eternal through faith in Him.]

[*"From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water."* The "innermost being" of one who places faith in Christ for salvation will receive the Holy Spirit, the Source of an abundant, overflowing, refreshing, and never-ending life.]

I AM THE DOOR; IF ANYONE ENTERS THROUGH ME, HE WILL BE SAVED AND WILL GO IN AND OUT AND FIND PASTURE. (JOHN 10:9) ¹⁷⁴

[*"the Door."* Christ is not "a" door (that is, one of several doors). He is "the" one and only Entrance to God the Father.]

"I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, THE LIFE; NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER BUT THROUGH ME." (JOHN 14:6)

[“*he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.*” Jesus Christ is the only Means of salvation from eternal death unto eternal life, allowing one to partake of God’s blessings (“pasture”) of eternal life.]

99) The believer who lives by faith (resulting in a lifestyle of repentance and obedience) will enjoy the abundant life in Christ

*IF YOU ARE LIVING ACCORDING TO THE FLESH, YOU MUST DIE; BUT IF BY THE SPIRIT YOU ARE PUTTING TO DEATH THE DEEDS OF THE BODY, YOU WILL LIVE. (ROMANS 8:13)*¹⁷⁵

[The ability to “live by faith (resulting in a lifestyle of repentance and obedience)” is a work of the Spirit of God. Only by His motivation and power can the believer *deliberately* choose to say “No” to the sins that tempt him and, instead, to say “Yes” to the righteous commands of Scripture. As he employs *faith* (trust in God) to cultivate this lifestyle, he will increasingly *enjoy* the indwelling presence of God in his life (the abundant life).]

*THEREFORE, LET US BE DILIGENT TO ENTER THAT REST, SO THAT NO ONE WILL FALL, THROUGH FOLLOWING THE SAME EXAMPLE OF DISOBEDIENCE. (HEBREWS 4:11)*¹⁷⁶

[“*let us.*” Since the author of this book identifies himself with this 1st-century audience (“us”), he apparently considers them to be believers. Furthermore, since there are many references to the *Old* Covenant throughout this letter, the original audience was apparently Jewish (hence, the book’s title, *Hebrews*). Jewish *unbelievers* were putting pressure on these Jewish believers to abandon their faith in Christ Jesus and the New Covenant and return to Old Covenant practices. That is why the author, throughout the book, repeatedly presents the superiority of Christianity over Judaism as his defense.]

[This book is an exhortation for these Jewish *believers* to remain true to their belief in salvation *by faith in Christ* rather than *return* to their former belief system (salvation *by works of the Law*). For them to return to legalism would be to return to a life of *unbelief* (rejecting God’s provision of His Son). It would also mean returning to a life of *disobedience*. (To fail in just one point of the Law is to break the whole Law, James 2:10). The author is cautioning his readers not to commit the same errors that characterized the generation of Israelites that wandered in the wilderness for forty years: *unbelief* and *disobedience*.]

[“*let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall.*” Therefore, to remain true to their faith in Jesus Christ is to cease from working for their salvation. The exchange of fear and uncertainty for assurance and peace is the promise. It is a promise of “rest.”]

B. An Assurance of Salvation

100) The believer who practices godly virtues will not doubt his salvation but, instead, will have an assurance of eternal life

THEREFORE, BRETHREN, BE ALL THE MORE DILIGENT TO MAKE CERTAIN ABOUT HIS CALLING AND CHOOSING YOU; FOR AS LONG AS YOU PRACTICE THESE THINGS (MORAL EXCELLENCE, KNOWLEDGE, SELF-CONTROL, PERSEVERANCE, GODLINESS, BROTHERLY KINDNESS, AND LOVE), YOU WILL NEVER STUMBLE; FOR IN THIS WAY, THE ENTRANCE INTO THE ETERNAL KINGDOM OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST WILL BE ABUNDANTLY SUPPLIED TO YOU."

(2ND PETER 1:10-11, PARENTHESIS ADDED) ¹⁷⁷

[*"as long as you practice these things."* The ability to practice godly virtues is a work of the Spirit of God. Only by His motivation and power can the believer say "No" to sin and "Yes" to righteousness. The believer, therefore, must pursue this lifestyle with a prayerful attitude, "Please give me everything I need to do Your will, because I can't without Your help." As he does, the character of the Christian will gradually conform to the character of Christ: moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love.]

[In practicing these things, the *presence of God within him* becomes increasingly evident to him. His "calling and choosing" is made "*certain*."]

C. Discernment

101) The Spirit of God will give the believer who strives to obey the Word of God the ability to discern whether Jesus' words come from God or not

SO, JESUS ANSWERED THEM AND SAID, "MY TEACHING IS NOT MINE, BUT HIS WHO SENT ME. IF ANYONE IS WILLING TO DO HIS WILL, HE WILL KNOW OF THE TEACHING, WHETHER IT IS OF GOD OR WHETHER I SPEAK FROM MYSELF." (JOHN 7:16-17) ¹⁷⁸

[*"If anyone is willing to do His will."* Obedience is the key to this promise of discernment.]

[*"he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or ... from Myself"* (as a mere religious man). The ability to distinguish the Truth of God from the error of man is known as discernment. (Or better, it is the ability to distinguish between what is *completely* true [God's Truth] and what is *almost* true [Satan's lies].) Discernment is not the same as common sense, nor is it acquired by formal education. It is, instead, a work of the Spirit of God, cultivated by one's on-going *exposure* to the Word of God *and his application of it to his life*.]

D. Experience Christ in His Fullness

102) The believer who perseveres in the faith will experience Christ in His fullness throughout the Millennial Kingdom

HE WHO OVERCOMES, AND HE WHO KEEPS MY DEEDS UNTIL THE END ... I WILL GIVE HIM THE MORNING STAR.
(REVELATION 2:26-28) ¹⁷⁹

[*“He who overcomes.”* One “who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” That is, he believes that Jesus is God, that the Father sent Him to serve as “the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world,” and that His Sacrifice is the payment for *his* sins. The overcomer is one who is saved (1st John 5:4-5).]

[*“I will give him the morning star.”* The term “morning star” is difficult to interpret. In Revelation 22:16, Jesus refers to Himself as “the bright morning Star.”

- 1) It may refer to *the eternal life* one receives from Christ.
- 2) Or it may refer to the believer’s *introduction to Christ in His fullness at the Rapture of the Church* (before the dark hours preceding the dawn of the Millennial Kingdom).
- 3) Or it may refer to the believer’s *exposure to Christ’s fullness as he co-reigns with Him in the Millennial Kingdom.*

The immediate context of Revelation 2:26-27 favors (3).]

103) The believer will fellowship with Christ in the fullness of holiness and purity throughout eternity

(T)HEY WILL WALK WITH ME IN WHITE, FOR THEY ARE WORTHY. HE WHO OVERCOMES WILL THUS BE CLOTHED IN WHITE GARMENTS. (REVELATION 3:4-5) ¹⁸⁰

[*“He who overcomes.”* One “who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” That is, he believes that Jesus is God, that the Father sent Him to serve as “the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world,” and that His Sacrifice is the payment for *his* sins. The overcomer is one who is saved (1st John 5:4-5).]

[*“They will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He ... will thus be clothed in white garments.”* White garments speak of purity. Believers are “worthy” to be so clothed because they are overcomers. Thus, the “white garments” are symbolic of the holiness and righteousness of God. Such garments are reserved for Christ and the glorified church.]

E. Fellowship with God

- 104) The believer who separates himself from those whose belief systems and behavior violate God's righteousness and truth will experience the special intimacy of fellowship that a father has with his children**

"THEREFORE, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," SAYS THE LORD. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; AND I WILL WELCOME YOU. AND I WILL BE A FATHER TO YOU, AND YOU SHALL BE SONS AND DAUGHTERS TO ME," SAYS THE LORD ALMIGHTY. (2ND CORINTHIANS 6:17-18) ¹⁸¹

[This is not a call to remove oneself from having contact with *professing unbelievers* (1st Corinthians 5:9-10). To the contrary, it is to them that the Church is commanded to take the Gospel (Matthew 28:19-20).]

[*"come out from their midst and be separate ... do not touch what is unclean."* To be separate is "to set ourselves apart from"

(1) "the **ways** of the world" (worldliness) (1st John 2:15-16)

(2) making binding alliances with unbelievers, that is, "contracts" we cannot easily walk away from (2nd Corinthians 6:14-17)

(3) *professing* believers who refuse to repent of their blatant immorality (2nd Thessalonians 3:14; Matthew 18:15-17; 1st Corinthians 5:1-2, 11; 2nd Thessalonians 3:6; Titus 3:10-11) and

(4) *professing* believers who promote heresy (Romans 16:17; 2nd John 1:9-11).

F. Forgiveness Experienced

- 105) The believer who confesses his sins to God will experience God's forgiveness**

IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS FAITHFUL AND RIGHTEOUS TO FORGIVE US OUR SINS AND TO CLEANSE US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS. (1ST JOHN 1:9) ¹⁸²

[The Apostle John wrote this letter to those who were already believers. (Its purpose is not evangelistic.) The moment a person is saved, he receives a full and forever pardon (forgiveness) from God. From that point on his sins are "remembered no more" (Hebrews 8:12, 10:16-17). But to *experience* the blessing of his forgiveness (versus carrying around guilt), one must confess the sin (and depend upon the Holy Spirit to empower him to turn away from it).]

106) The believer who forgives those who have wronged him will experience the blessings of God's forgiveness of his sins

WHENEVER YOU STAND PRAYING, FORGIVE, IF YOU HAVE ANYTHING AGAINST ANYONE, SO THAT YOUR FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN WILL ALSO FORGIVE YOU YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS. (MARK 11:25) ¹⁸³

[“so that your Father Who is in heaven will also forgive you.” The moment a person trusts in Jesus Christ for salvation, *all* his sins (past, present, and future) are *fully and forever* forgiven him. From that point on, he stands before God permanently pardoned. (He does not go back and forth between being forgiven one day and unforgiven the next.) He should, however, take care. Only when he is willing to forgive those who have wronged him will he be able to *experience the blessings* of his forgiveness (the joy of the Holy Spirit, the peace of God, the assurance of salvation, fellowship with God).]

107) The believer who prays for a fellow believer to repent from a sin will participate in delivering the erring one from his broken fellowship with God

IF ANYONE SEES HIS BROTHER COMMITTING A SIN NOT LEADING TO DEATH, HE SHALL ASK AND GOD WILL, FOR HIM, GIVE LIFE TO THOSE WHO COMMIT SIN NOT LEADING TO DEATH. (1ST JOHN 5:16) ¹⁸⁴

[“a sin ... leading to death.” It is possible for a sin to surpass the tolerance of the longsuffering God. A sin that is deliberate, high-handed, and remains unconfessed may result in God's ultimate discipline, physical death.]

108) God will forgive and restore a believer who has become weakened by sin with physical and spiritual health in response to the confession of his sins to the elders of his church

IS ANYONE AMONG YOU SICK? THEN HE MUST CALL FOR THE ELDERS OF THE CHURCH AND THEY ARE TO PRAY OVER HIM, ANOINTING HIM WITH OIL IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; AND THE PRAYER OFFERED IN FAITH WILL RESTORE THE ONE WHO IS SICK, AND THE LORD WILL RAISE HIM UP, AND IF HE HAS COMMITTED SINS, THEY WILL BE FORGIVEN HIM. THEREFORE, CONFESS YOUR SINS TO ONE ANOTHER, AND PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER SO THAT YOU MAY BE HEALED. (JAMES 5:14-16) ¹⁸⁵

[The overall context of this passage pertains to “suffering” caused by evil treatment / persecution (James 5:1ff). Note the introduction of sin into this discussion. “If he has committed sins.” It may be that this person has become severely weakened by the *sins* to which he has turned to “kill the pain of *persecution*.” For a believer to remain in an on-going, deliberate sin will weaken him both spiritually and physically. His whole person will become “sick” (see 1st Corinthians 11:26-32).]

[For the suffering one to “call for the elders” reveals a sincere willingness to confess and repent of his sins from a contrite heart. This confession and repentance are the bases for his healing.]

[The use of “oil” represents the Holy Spirit’s Presence as He forgives (spiritually) and restores (physically) the repentant sinner.]

[The elders’ presence is the official recognition of the church’s willingness to restore this erring brother to fellowship, a fellowship that sin had broken (*see Matthew 18:15-17*). Their presence also provides the means through whom the Holy Spirit ministers to the sinner.]

G. Fruitful Service

109) The scope of the believer’s ministry will surpass that of Christ’s ministry

*TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, HE WHO BELIEVES IN ME, THE WORKS THAT I DO, HE WILL DO ALSO; AND GREATER WORKS THAN THESE HE WILL DO, BECAUSE I GO TO THE FATHER. (JOHN 14:12)*¹⁸⁶

[“*greater works.*” Jesus did *not* mean that the believer’s works would be more powerful than His. He meant that they would be *broader in scope*. That is, they would extend throughout the world. Jesus’ ministry focused primarily on “the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:5-6, 15:21-28). The Church’s focus is on “all the nations” (Matthew 28:18-20), “even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).]

[“*because I go to the Father.*” This level of ministry will be possible because the Father would send the Holy Spirit to indwell the believer after Christ’s Ascension (Luke 24:49; John 16:7; Acts 1:8). The believer, therefore, has the same source of power as did Christ (namely, the Holy Spirit).]

110) Every believer, now indwelled by the Holy Spirit, will be able to testify of Christ with divine power

*... BUT YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS COME UPON YOU (ACTS 1:8)*¹⁸⁷

[*Since* the Day of Pentecost, every believer receives – at the time of salvation – the indwelling Holy Spirit, providing him with the power to help him testify of Jesus Christ.]

111) The believer who submits to (obeys) the will of Christ will become an effective witness to others

*AND JESUS SAID TO THEM, “FOLLOW ME, AND I WILL MAKE YOU BECOME FISHERS OF MEN.” (MARK 1:17)*¹⁸⁸

[“*Follow Me.*” To follow Jesus is to follow His example of laying aside one’s self-centered interests and, instead, submitting to the Father’s will. It is a life of faith and obedience.]

[*“and I will make you become fishers of men.”* As a result of submitting to the Father’s will, Jesus will equip His followers “to gather (‘to fish’) people out of the ‘sea’ of sin and death.” That is, they will become more effective in evangelism.]

112) The believer who submits his will to the will of the Father daily will bear much spiritual fruit

TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, UNLESS A GRAIN OF WHEAT FALLS INTO THE EARTH AND DIES, IT REMAINS ALONE; BUT IF IT DIES, IT BEARS MUCH FRUIT. (JOHN 12:24) ¹⁸⁹

[The context of this verse has to do with “the *cost* of following Christ.” When Jesus said that one must “die” to be His disciple, He meant that one must no longer prioritize his own will over God’s will. He must set aside his own interests (that disregard the will of God) and, instead, pursue the interests of the Father. (“Yet not My will but Yours be done.” Luke 22:42)]

[To do so is to “die daily to self,” to “set aside one’s self-interests,” to “carry one’s cross.” God promises a fruitful life and eternal rewards to the one who makes this commitment.]

THEREFORE, IF ANYONE CLEANSSES HIMSELF FROM THESE THINGS, HE WILL BE A VESSEL FOR HONOR, SANCTIFIED, USEFUL TO THE MASTER, PREPARED FOR EVERY GOOD WORK. (2ND TIMOTHY 2:21) ¹⁹⁰

[*“If anyone cleanses himself from these things.”* The believer’s “pursuit of holiness” involves separating himself from those in the church whose lives are corrupt and whose teachings are false.]

113) As they remain faithful to the Lord, Christian mothers will have a spiritual impact in the lives of their children

BUT WOMEN WILL BE PRESERVED THROUGH THE BEARING OF CHILDREN IF THEY CONTINUE IN FAITH AND LOVE AND SANCTITY WITH SELF-RESTRAINT. (1ST TIMOTHY 2:15) ¹⁹¹

[*“Preserved.”* The immediate context of this verse has to do with what Paul does *not* want women to do within the church (vss. 11-14). How then can women have a spiritual impact in the lives of others? By the influence they have through *good works* (vs. 10) and, if married, by *supporting their husbands in his work (thereby making husband and wife co-laborers in a shared calling) and raising their children* (vs. 15). Within this context the idea of the word “preserved” is “to be saved / delivered from a fruitless life ... from a life void of service ... from spiritual insignificance.”]

- 114) Through the pursuit of holiness and the accurate explanation of God's Word, the pastor / the teacher will experience sanctification (in purity and uprightness) in his own life and help cultivate spiritual growth in the lives of others**

PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO YOURSELF AND TO YOUR TEACHING; PERSEVERE IN THESE THINGS, FOR AS YOU DO THIS YOU WILL ENSURE SALVATION (SANCTIFICATION) BOTH FOR YOURSELF AND FOR THOSE WHO HEAR YOU.

*(1ST TIMOTHY 4:16, PARENTHESIS ADDED)*¹⁹²

H. Fruitless Life

- 115) The believer who refuses to submit his will to the will of the Father will live a fruitless life**

*TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, UNLESS A GRAIN OF WHEAT FALLS INTO THE EARTH AND DIES, IT REMAINS ALONE (JOHN 12:24)*¹⁹³

[The context of this verse has to do with "the cost of following Christ." When Jesus said that one must "die" to be His disciple, He meant that one must no longer prioritize his own will over God's will. He must set aside his own interests (that disregard the will of God) and, instead, pursue the interests of the Father. For one to refuse to do so is to *disobey God*. This will result in a wasted life and a loss of eternal rewards. See (110) above.]

[See above (promise # 189, John 12:24) for the positive side of this principle.]

- 116) The believer who responds to God's Word with unbelief and disobedience will suffer both temporal and eternal losses**

*FOR GROUND THAT DRINKS THE RAIN WHICH OFTEN FALLS ON IT ... BUT ... YIELDS THORNS AND THISTLES, IT IS WORTHLESS AND CLOSE TO BEING CURSED, AND IT ENDS UP BEING BURNED. BUT, BELOVED, WE ARE CONVINCED OF BETTER THINGS CONCERNING YOU, AND **THINGS THAT ACCOMPANY SALVATION**, THOUGH WE ARE SPEAKING IN THIS WAY. (HEBREWS 6:7-9)*¹⁹⁴

[*"ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it."* An illustration describing *believers* who receive (believe and obey) the Word of God.]

[*"yields thorns and thistles."* When unbelief and disobedience characterize the life of a *believer*, it is because he is failing to yield his will to the will of God. As a result, the Spirit of God does not empower his deeds. Tragically, his life is a detriment to God's kingdom and Name.]

[*"it is worthless and close to being cursed."* As a result of these dead works, much of his life will be regarded as "worthless" at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Yet even though it is a

life that is “close to being cursed,” it will not be, for in every believer’s life there are “things that accompany salvation” (1st Corinthians 4:5).]

[“it ends up being burned.” The believer who hears the Word of God but disregards or rejects it will experience loss *in this life*: (1) He will become “dull of hearing” (Hebrews 5:11-14). That is, his capacity to understand God’s Word will fade, losing his ability to discern spiritual truths. (2) His life’s witness will become increasingly weakened and fruitless.]

[Furthermore, he will experience loss *throughout eternity*. (3) Because his witness was useless, he will suffer a loss of eternal rewards. Although his soul will be saved, his works will be burned. The promise of Hebrews 6:7-9 is, in fact, a warning. It is a promise of loss.]

NOW IF ANY MAN BUILDS ON THE FOUNDATION WITH GOLD, SILVER, PRECIOUS STONES, WOOD, HAY, STRAW, EACH MAN’S WORK WILL BECOME EVIDENT; FOR THE DAY WILL SHOW IT BECAUSE IT IS TO BE REVEALED WITH FIRE, AND THE FIRE ITSELF WILL TEST THE QUALITY OF EACH MAN’S WORK ... IF ANY MAN’S WORK IS BURNED UP, HE WILL SUFFER LOSS; BUT HE HIMSELF WILL BE SAVED, YET SO AS THROUGH FIRE. (1ST CORINTHIANS 3:12-13,15)

I. Giving

117) Local churches that provide for the needs of Christ’s missionaries will have all their needs abundantly met by God

BUT I HAVE RECEIVED EVERYTHING IN FULL AND HAVE AN ABUNDANCE; I AM AMPLY SUPPLIED, HAVING RECEIVED FROM EPAPHRODITUS WHAT YOU HAVE SENT, A FRAGRANT AROMA, AN ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE, WELL-PLEASING TO GOD. AND MY GOD WILL SUPPLY ALL YOUR NEEDS ACCORDING TO HIS RICHES IN GLORY IN CHRIST JESUS. (PHILIPPIANS 4:18-19)¹⁹⁵

[Though God makes this promise to local churches with a passion to participate in the Great Commission (worldwide), this could also apply to individual believers who give to support missionary endeavors.]

118) The believer who generously gives his earthly resources to the cause of Christ will receive from God an increasing means to give even more

NOW THIS I SAY ... HE WHO SOWS BOUNTIFULLY WILL ALSO REAP BOUNTIFULLY ... AND GOD IS ABLE TO MAKE ALL GRACE ABOUND TO YOU, SO THAT ALWAYS HAVING ALL SUFFICIENCY IN EVERYTHING, YOU MAY HAVE AN ABUNDANCE FOR EVERY GOOD DEED ... NOW HE WHO SUPPLIES SEED TO THE SOWER AND BREAD FOR FOOD WILL SUPPLY AND MULTIPLY YOUR SEED FOR SOWING YOU WILL BE ENRICHED IN EVERYTHING FOR ALL LIBERALITY (2ND CORINTHIANS 9:6, 8, 10-11)¹⁹⁶

[*“he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”* As with the harvest of a crop, a spiritual harvest is proportionate to the volume of spiritual “seed” sown. To the degree a person invests in the kingdom of God (in time, energy, health, abilities, money, material resources, opportunities, experience, education), God will give a proportionate return. This principle applies to those who “sow bountifully.” A large investment (of one’s resources) will yield a large return (eternal reward).]

[*“God is able to make all grace abound to you so that ... you may have an abundance for every good deed ... He will supply and multiply your seed for sowing ... you will be enriched in everything for (the purpose of) all liberality.”* God promises to replenish the material resources given by the believer so that he might give even more to further the Great Commission.]

[The believer’s motive for giving should not be to receive back from God an abundance of money or material goods to spend upon self. The spirit behind the teaching of “Prosperity Theology” is not from God. It is from a worldly, self-indulgent spirit of greed and materialism.]

119) The believer who invests his earthly resources in the eternal welfare of others will receive eternal rewards

*AND GOD IS ABLE TO MAKE ALL GRACE ABOUND TO YOU, SO THAT ALWAYS HAVING ALL SUFFICIENCY IN EVERYTHING, YOU MAY HAVE AN ABUNDANCE FOR EVERY GOOD DEED; AS IT IS WRITTEN, “HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER.” NOW HE WHO SUPPLIES SEED TO THE SOWER AND BREAD FOR FOOD WILL SUPPLY AND MULTIPLY YOUR SEED FOR SOWING AND INCREASE THE HARVEST OF YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS (2ND CORINTHIANS 9:8-10)*¹⁹⁷

[*“his righteousness endures forever” ... “and increase the harvest of your righteousness.”* One’s temporal investments in the kingdom of Christ are acts of righteousness for which God promises eternal rewards.]

*... THE ONE WHO SOWS TO THE SPIRIT WILL FROM THE SPIRIT REAP ETERNAL LIFE. (GALATIANS 6:8)*¹⁹⁸

[The context of Galatians 6:6-10 has to do with the believer’s financial support of Christian workers. If he invests his finances to advance the Savior’s Church, that investment will bear eternal rewards (“treasures in heaven”).]

DO NOT STORE UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES ON EARTH, WHERE MOTH AND RUST DESTROY, AND WHERE THIEVES BREAK IN AND STEAL. BUT STORE UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES IN HEAVEN, WHERE NEITHER MOTH NOR RUST DESTROYS, AND WHERE THIEVES DO NOT BREAK IN OR STEAL; FOR WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS, THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE ALSO. (MATTHEW 6:19-21)

120) The believer who generously gives his earthly resources to the cause of Christ will cultivate within the recipients a desire to glorify God

BECAUSE OF THE PROOF GIVEN BY THIS MINISTRY (OF GIVING), THEY (THE RECIPIENTS) WILL GLORIFY GOD FOR YOUR OBEDIENCE TO YOUR CONFESSION OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST AND FOR THE LIBERALITY OF YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THEM AND TO ALL. (2ND CORINTHIANS 9:13, PARENTHESES ADDED) ¹⁹⁹

[“Because of the proof given by this ministry.” Giving proves that one’s profession of faith in Christ Jesus is genuine.]

[“They will glorify God for your obedience to your confession ... and for the liberality of your contribution to them.” The ministry of giving will motivate the recipients to praise God for His work in the giver’s life, that is, for his obedience to the faith and for the abundant vitality of his spiritual life.]

121) At the proper time God will reward the believer for his faithfulness who – though discouraged – perseveres in his ministry

LET US NOT LOSE HEART IN DOING GOOD, FOR IN DUE TIME WE WILL REAP IF WE DO NOT GROW WEARY. (GALATIANS 6:9) ²⁰⁰

[The context of Galatians 6:9 deals primarily with the believer’s use of his financial resources to support Christian workers. At times discouragement will tempt the steward of Christ to give up because of the little fruit he sees from his gifts. Nevertheless, the Spirit of God encourages him to persevere. His reward for faithfulness will eventually come. Perhaps he will receive a partial reward in this life; but most certainly, he will receive a full reward when his Master, the Lord Jesus, evaluates his life at the Judgment Seat of Christ.]

[Because other passages encourage faithfulness in one’s labor for Christ, it is believed that this promise can be more broadly applied to stewardship in general.]

122) The believer who gives little to the cause of Christ will receive a meager harvest

NOW THIS I SAY, HE WHO SOWS SPARINGLY WILL ALSO REAP SPARINGLY (2ND CORINTHIANS 9:6) ²⁰¹

[As with the harvest of a crop, a spiritual harvest is proportionate to the volume of spiritual “seed” sown. To the degree a person invests in the kingdom of God (in time, energy, health, abilities, money, material resources, opportunities, experience, education), God will give a proportionate return. This same principle applies to those who “sow sparingly.” A small investment will yield a small return.]

J. Good Works

123) The believer who is rich in good works will receive eternal rewards (“treasures in heaven,” Matthew 6:19-21)

*INSTRUCT THEM TO DO GOOD, TO BE RICH IN GOOD WORKS, TO BE GENEROUS AND READY TO SHARE, STORING UP FOR THEMSELVES THE TREASURE OF A GOOD FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE, SO THAT THEY MAY TAKE HOLD OF THAT WHICH IS LIFE INDEED. (1ST TIMOTHY 6:18-19)*²⁰²

[If the believer has an eternal perspective, he will invest his time, energy, health, abilities, money, material resources, opportunities, experience, and education in the advancement of Christ’s Church for the glory of God’s Name. Those who store up these “treasures in heaven” will receive eternal dividends (see Matthew 6:19-21).]

K. Honor through Submission

124) God will honor the believer who serves Jesus

*IF ANYONE SERVES ME, HE MUST FOLLOW ME; AND WHERE I AM, THERE MY SERVANT WILL BE ALSO; IF ANYONE SERVES ME, THE FATHER WILL HONOR HIM. (JOHN 12:26)*²⁰³

[Jesus requires the one who “serves” Him to “follow” Him. To follow Jesus is to follow His example of dying to self (that is, saying “No” to one’s self-centered interests) while submitting his will to the will of the Father. This is what it means to be like a grain of wheat that “falls into the earth and dies” (12:24) and to “hate one’s life in this world” (12:25).]

FOR I HAVE COME DOWN FROM HEAVEN, NOT TO DO MY OWN WILL, BUT THE WILL OF HIM WHO SENT ME. (JOHN 6:38)

[The Father promises to honor this life of obedience in glory.]

125) At the proper time believers who humble themselves before God and others in the church will be exalted

*YOU YOUNGER MEN, LIKEWISE, BE SUBJECT TO YOUR ELDERS; AND ALL OF YOU, CLOTHE YOURSELVES WITH HUMILITY TOWARD ONE ANOTHER, FOR GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. THEREFORE HUMBLE YOURSELVES UNDER THE MIGHTY HAND OF GOD, THAT HE MAY EXALT YOU AT THE PROPER TIME, CASTING ALL YOUR ANXIETY ON HIM, BECAUSE HE CARES FOR YOU. (1ST PETER 5:5-7)*²⁰⁴

[The Holy Spirit first corrects the arrogant attitude of younger men toward their church's leadership, then instructs all members of the church to have a submissive attitude toward one another as well. Those who do, God promises to honor them at the proper time.]

L. Peace through Faith and Obedience

126) If the believer responds to his anxieties with prayer, God will flood him with His peaceful composure

*BE ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING, BUT IN EVERYTHING BY PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION WITH THANKSGIVING LET YOUR REQUESTS BE MADE KNOWN TO GOD. AND THE PEACE OF GOD, WHICH SURPASSES ALL COMPREHENSION, WILL GUARD YOUR HEARTS AND YOUR MINDS IN CHRIST JESUS. (PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7)*²⁰⁵

[According to verse 6, the "requests" one presents to God concern the situations that are making him "anxious." By handing these circumstances (that he *cannot* control) over to God (Who *does* control them), he will experience the supernatural "peace of God."]

127) The believer who obeys God will rest in the abiding fellowship of the God of peace

*THE THINGS YOU HAVE LEARNED AND RECEIVED AND HEARD AND SEEN IN ME, PRACTICE THESE THINGS, AND THE GOD OF PEACE WILL BE WITH YOU. (PHILIPPIANS 4:9)*²⁰⁶

[Because "*the God of peace*" is in close fellowship "*with*" the one who obeys His will, "*the peace of God*" will fill his heart.]

M. Prayer

128) God will answer "Yes" to prayers that are in alignment with His will

*THIS IS THE CONFIDENCE WHICH WE HAVE BEFORE HIM, THAT, IF WE ASK ANYTHING ACCORDING TO HIS WILL, HE HEARS US. AND IF WE KNOW THAT HE HEARS US IN WHATEVER WE ASK, WE KNOW THAT WE HAVE THE REQUESTS WHICH WE HAVE ASKED FROM HIM. (1ST JOHN 5:14-15)*²⁰⁷

[In Philippians 4:6-7 the Spirit of God encourages us to "let our requests be known to God," no matter how small or how great. Such requests are based upon *our* will (what we would like for Him to do), and therefore, His answers will vary (sometimes "Yes," sometimes "Not yet," sometimes "No"). But what God has *guaranteed* to do is *His* will, found in black and white on the pages of Scripture. This is why faith is strengthened as one studies the Bible.]

[“anything according to His will.” We can be sure that for “whatever we ask,” God will answer “Yes” ... “IF” the **content** of our prayers focuses on the fulfillment of *His* will. (Our prayers are to be God-centered, not self-centered, Mark 14:36). Through prayers made in faith, God has given us the privilege of participating with Him in the fulfillment of *His* purposes (not the fulfillment of *our* purposes).]

129) God will answer “Yes” to prayers that are based on the merits and authority of Christ (“in My Name”)

*IN THAT DAY YOU WILL NOT QUESTION ME ABOUT ANYTHING. TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, IF YOU ASK THE FATHER FOR ANYTHING IN MY NAME, HE WILL GIVE IT TO YOU. UNTIL NOW YOU HAVE ASKED FOR NOTHING IN MY NAME; ASK AND YOU WILL RECEIVE, SO THAT YOUR JOY MAY BE MADE FULL. (JOHN 16:23-24)*²⁰⁸

[“in My Name.” The proper **attitude** of prayer is one of *humility*, knowing that our access to God through prayer is based solely on *the merits and authority of Christ*. Our “right” to approach God’s throne is based entirely on Christ’s value, not on personal worthiness.]

[“so that your joy may be made full.” To have this attitude of prayer is only possible through the work of the Holy Spirit. (It is not a work of the flesh.) Therefore, to “pray in the Spirit” is a miracle. Its **result** will be a soul overflowing with joy.]

130) God will answer “Yes” to prayers that pursue the glory of God

*WHATEVER YOU ASK IN MY NAME, THAT WILL I DO, SO THAT THE FATHER MAY BE GLORIFIED IN THE SON. IF YOU ASK ME ANYTHING IN MY NAME, I WILL DO IT. (JOHN 14:13-14)*²⁰⁹

[“so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” The proper **goal** of prayer is one that *seeks the glory of God*. (It is God-centered, not self-centered.)]

131) God will answer “Yes” to prayers that are made in faith (trusting God to do *His* will)

*AND JESUS SAID TO HIM, “‘IF (I) CAN?’ ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE TO HIM WHO BELIEVES.” (MARK 9:23)*²¹⁰

*TRULY I SAY TO YOU, WHOEVER SAYS TO THIS MOUNTAIN, ‘BE TAKEN UP AND CAST INTO THE SEA,’ AND DOES NOT DOUBT IN HIS HEART, BUT BELIEVES THAT WHAT HE SAYS IS GOING TO HAPPEN, IT WILL BE GRANTED HIM. THEREFORE, I SAY TO YOU, ALL THINGS FOR WHICH YOU PRAY AND ASK, BELIEVE THAT YOU HAVE RECEIVED THEM, AND THEY WILL BE GRANTED YOU. (MARK 11:23-24)*²¹¹

[“all things are possible to him who believes” (Mark 9:23). And “all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you” (Mark 11:23-24). There are no limits to what believers can achieve through prayer (1) if their requests are in alignment with the will and purposes of God and (2) if they “believe that

what (God) says (in His Word) is going to happen.” Faith is the **requirement** for prayer to be answered.]

[To trust God to do anything *less* than His will is a perversion of faith. (The request is man-centered, not God-centered). It, therefore, will not be honored by the throne of a loving God (1st John 5:14-15).]

Therefore, (1) the *content* of prayer is the fulfillment of God’s will, (2) the *attitude* of prayer is one of humility, knowing that our access to God is based solely on *the merits and authority of Christ*, (3) the *goal* of prayer is God’s glory, (4) the *requirement* for prayer to be answered is faith, believing that what God says will happen, (5) the *ability* to pray in this way (1-4) is only possible through the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. (It is to “pray in the Spirit.”) And (6) the *result* of “praying in the Spirit” is a soul that overflows with joy.

132) God will answer the prayers of the believer who remains in fellowship with Christ (through faith and obedience)

IF YOU ABIDE IN ME AND MY WORDS ABIDE IN YOU, ASK WHATEVER YOU WISH, AND IT WILL BE DONE FOR YOU. (JOHN 15:7) ²¹²

[“If you abide in Me and My words abide in you.” Because of the believer’s rebirth, the indwelling Spirit of God will draw him to the Scriptures. As he saturates his mind and heart with the *written* Word of God, the believer will grow in his devotion to the *Living* Word of God (Jesus Christ). As a result, the believer will seek to do what pleases his Lord. Over time, as he learns to trust and obey God, he remains in close fellowship with Christ (that is, he “*abides in*” Him).]

[“ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” Furthermore, as he takes in more of God’s Word, he is confident that God will give him what he wants because his desires conform to God’s desires. That is, he will learn how to pray according to God’s will. As a result, God assures him that his requests “will be done for” him.]

AND THIS IS THE CONFIDENCE WHICH WE HAVE BEFORE HIM THAT, IF WE ASK ANYTHING ACCORDING TO HIS WILL, HE HEARS US. AND IF WE KNOW THAT HE HEARS US IN WHATEVER WE ASK, WE KNOW THAT WE HAVE THE REQUESTS WHICH WE HAVE ASKED FROM HIM. (1ST JOHN 5:14-15)

WHATEVER WE ASK WE RECEIVE FROM HIM, BECAUSE WE KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS AND DO THE THINGS THAT ARE PLEASING IN HIS SIGHT. (1ST JOHN 3:22) ²¹³

[“Whatever we ask we receive from Him.” The one who is devoted to the same interests that God has (“*the things that are pleasing in His sight*”) will have this confidence.]

133) God will restore a believer who has become weakened (“sick”) from persecution with spiritual (and physical) refreshment in response to the prayers of the elders of his church

*IS ANYONE AMONG YOU SICK? THEN HE MUST CALL FOR THE ELDERS OF THE CHURCH AND THEY ARE TO PRAY OVER HIM, ANOINTING HIM WITH OIL IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; AND THE PRAYER OFFERED IN FAITH WILL RESTORE THE ONE WHO IS SICK, AND THE LORD WILL RAISE HIM UP (JAMES 5:14-15)*²¹⁴

[The overall context of this passage pertains to “suffering” caused by evil treatment / persecution (James 5:1ff). Apparently, the “sickness” of verses 14 and 15 is the result of this suffering. This weakened one is to call upon the elders of his church to strengthen him through prayer and encouragement. Probably, the oil is a *symbol* of the Holy Spirit’s Presence and ministry of *spiritual* restoration through the elders. It may also be that the use of oil is to refresh him *physically*, bruised and battered by persecution.]

N. The Proper Response to Trials

134) The believer who humbly accepts and faithfully endures the trials that come into his life will grow in spiritual maturity

*CONSIDER IT ALL JOY, MY BRETHREN, WHEN YOU ENCOUNTER VARIOUS TRIALS, KNOWING THAT THE TESTING OF YOUR FAITH PRODUCES ENDURANCE. AND LET ENDURANCE HAVE ITS PERFECT RESULT, SO THAT YOU MAY BE PERFECT AND COMPLETE, LACKING IN NOTHING. (JAMES 1:2-4)*²¹⁵

[The overall context of this passage pertains to a believer’s proper response to the trials he faces. Here, he is to (1) *joyfully accept* – **by** faith – the purpose of trials (that is, his sanctification) and (2) *faithfully persevere* – **through** faith and obedience – during the trial. In doing so, God promises to further conform him to the image of Christ Jesus.]

135) The believer who prays for wisdom to know how to respond rightly to the trials he faces will receive God’s wisdom in abundance

*BUT IF ANY OF YOU LACKS WISDOM, LET HIM ASK OF GOD, WHO GIVES TO ALL GENEROUSLY AND WITHOUT REPROACH, AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO HIM. BUT HE MUST ASK IN FAITH WITHOUT ANY DOUBTING, FOR THE ONE WHO DOUBTS IS LIKE THE SURF OF THE SEA, DRIVEN AND TOSSED BY THE WIND. (JAMES 1:5-6)*²¹⁶

[The context of this promise concerns one’s desire to respond rightly to the trial he is facing. In response to his prayers, God promises to give him wisdom in abundance to address the dilemma.]

136) As it will be with all humanity, wealthy believers will one day die (then face an evaluation of their lives before the throne of God)

... THE RICH MAN IS TO GLORY IN HIS HUMILIATION, BECAUSE LIKE FLOWERING GRASS HE WILL PASS AWAY. FOR THE SUN RISES WITH A SCORCHING WIND AND WITHERS THE GRASS; AND ITS FLOWER FALLS OFF AND THE BEAUTY OF ITS APPEARANCE IS DESTROYED; SO TOO THE RICH MAN IN THE MIDST OF HIS PURSUITS WILL FADE AWAY. (JAMES 1:10-11) ²¹⁷

[The overall context of this passage pertains to a believer's proper response to the trials he faces. Here, the Spirit of God (through the Apostle James) exhorts the rich believer to cling to the Lord rather than to his wealth as his way of responding to the pain of a trial. He is to humbly accept – by faith – the purpose of trials (that is, his sanctification, 1:2-4) knowing that, as with all men, he too “will pass away” (leaving his riches behind) to bow in the Presence of Christ. Therefore, knowing that he will give an account one day before the Throne of God, *let the one who is rich glory in the eternal value of his trials rather than in the temporal value of his wealth.*]

137) At the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Son of God will acknowledge the one who persevered through trials and, in doing so, validated his eternal life

BLESSED IS A MAN WHO PERSEVERES UNDER TRIAL; FOR ONCE HE HAS BEEN APPROVED, HE WILL RECEIVE THE CROWN OF LIFE WHICH THE LORD HAS PROMISED TO THOSE WHO LOVE HIM. (JAMES 1:12; SEE COLOSSIANS 1:21-23; HEBREWS 4:14-16) ²¹⁸

[“*Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial.*” One who “perseveres” is one who remains steadfast in the faith. He does not abandon – in his heart or by his words – his faith in Christ.]

[“*once he has been approved.*” Perseverance under trial is not the *cause* of salvation. It is a *proof* of salvation. One is not saved by enduring; he endures because he *is* saved. Salvation is by faith ... and faith alone.]

[Once his salvation is validated by perseverance, the believer will receive “*the crown of life.*” This “crown” *is* eternal life. Eternal life is its substance. It is a “crown (consisting) of (eternal) life.”]

138) The believer who humbly submits to God's painful trials, “placing in His hands” his burden of anxiety, will be honored at the appropriate time

THEREFORE, HUMBLE YOURSELVES UNDER THE MIGHTY HAND OF GOD, THAT HE MAY EXALT YOU AT THE PROPER TIME, CASTING ALL YOUR ANXIETY ON HIM, BECAUSE HE CARES FOR YOU. (1ST PETER 5:6-7; SEE HEBREWS 4:14-16) ²¹⁹

139) God will bestow His promised blessings upon the believer who – while experiencing persecution – persists in identifying himself with Christ

FOR YOU HAVE NEED OF ENDURANCE, SO THAT WHEN YOU HAVE DONE THE WILL OF GOD, YOU MAY RECEIVE WHAT WAS PROMISED. (HEBREWS 10:36) ²²⁰

[The Book of Hebrews is an exhortation for Jewish *believers* to remain true to their faith in Christ Jesus and the New Covenant while suffering persecution at the hands of Jewish *unbelievers*. Through pressure to return to a legalistic form of Judaism (a works-based salvation), the author exhorts them to persevere.]

[“*what was promised.*” Refers to all the spiritual blessings they had received (their eternal inheritance) because of their identification with Jesus Christ.]

[“*you may receive what was promised.*” Because of their unbelief and disobedience, these believers were no longer *experiencing* the spiritual blessings they possessed. Their joy would be revived if they renewed their former attitude of faith and practice of obedience.]

[“*you have need of endurance.*” Perseverance is not the *cause* of salvation. It is a *proof* of salvation. One is not saved by enduring; he endures because he *already is* saved. Salvation is by faith ... and faith alone.]

IX. ABOUT SPIRITUAL WARFARE

A. Responding Rightly to Spiritual Warfare

- 140) As the believer responds to strife with other believers by “clinging to God,” God promises to strengthen him with His abiding presence and power**

*DRAW NEAR TO GOD, AND HE WILL DRAW NEAR TO YOU. (JAMES 4:8)*²²¹

[The context surrounding James 4:8 (4:1-12) addresses the “flesh-driven, demon-energized” conflicts that are (seemingly) ever-present among believers. This verse provides the *strategy* a believer can use to respond to strife in the power of the Holy Spirit; and it ends with a *promise*. First, the strategy. He is to cultivate a close fellowship with God through prayer, faith, and obedience to His Word. Second, the promise. In meeting this condition, his life will be guided and empowered by the ever-present Spirit of God.]

[Neither this strategy nor its promise makes the believer immune from *experiencing* strife. They can, however, prevent him from *responding* to it in the flesh.]

B. The World

- 141) Those whose sinful ways are exposed by the righteous character and deeds of believers will persecute those who submit their lives to the will of God**

*JESUS SAID, "TRULY I SAY TO YOU, THERE IS NO ONE WHO HAS LEFT HOUSE OR BROTHERS OR SISTERS OR MOTHER OR FATHER OR CHILDREN OR FARMS, FOR MY SAKE AND FOR THE GOSPEL'S SAKE, BUT THAT HE WILL RECEIVE ... PERSECUTIONS. (MARK 10:29-30)*²²²

[“he will receive persecutions.” These “persecutions” will come from various sources, including certain family members he “left behind” (either physically or spiritually): brothers, sisters, mother, father, children (Matthew 10:34-36; Luke 12:51-53).]

*INDEED, ALL WHO DESIRE TO LIVE GODLY IN CHRIST JESUS WILL BE PERSECUTED. (2ND TIMOTHY 3:12)*²²³

[Because the lives and witness of those who seek to follow the righteous will of Jesus expose the sinful deeds of the world, they can expect to be assaulted (in various ways).]

- 142) Those who persecute the believer for his good behavior will experience shame when their attack is met with the composure of Christ**

AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, BUT SANCTIFY CHRIST AS LORD IN YOUR HEARTS, ALWAYS BEING READY TO MAKE A DEFENSE TO EVERYONE WHO ASKS YOU TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT FOR THE HOPE THAT IS IN YOU, YET WITH GENTLENESS AND REVERENCE; AND KEEP A GOOD CONSCIENCE SO THAT IN THE THING IN WHICH YOU ARE SLANDERED, THOSE WHO REVILE YOUR GOOD BEHAVIOR IN CHRIST WILL BE PUT TO SHAME. (1ST PETER 3:14B-16) ²²⁴

- 143) The believer who experiences hardship and suffering because of his identification with Christ will receive an exceedingly great and eternal reward of glory**

MOMENTARY, LIGHT AFFLICTION IS PRODUCING FOR US AN ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY FAR BEYOND ALL COMPARISON. (2ND CORINTHIANS 4:17) ²²⁵

C. The Flesh

- 144) The believer who faces a severe temptation will receive from God whatever he needs to faithfully bear its intensity**

NO TEMPTATION HAS OVERTAKEN YOU BUT SUCH AS IS COMMON TO MAN; AND GOD IS FAITHFUL, WHO WILL NOT ALLOW YOU TO BE TEMPTED BEYOND WHAT YOU ARE ABLE, BUT WITH THE TEMPTATION WILL PROVIDE THE WAY OF ESCAPE ALSO, SO THAT YOU WILL BE ABLE TO ENDURE IT. (1ST CORINTHIANS 10:13) ²²⁶

[God does not promise the believer that temptation will be removed from him. He promises that the intensity of the temptation will not be greater than his God-given level of endurance. God will give the believer the strength he needs to *persevere* throughout the test.]

- 145) The believer who humbly lays aside his promotion of self for the sake of Christ will eventually be honored by God at the proper time**

HUMBLE YOURSELVES IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD, AND HE WILL EXALT YOU. (JAMES 4:10) ²²⁷

[Although the context of this passage (James 4:1-3) concerns the pursuit of one's self-centered ambitions (thereby creating strife within the Body of Christ), one can apply this promise more broadly to any temptation that would seek to exalt self.]

D. The Devil

146) God will deliver the believer who takes his stand of obedience against the temptations of Satan

*SUBMIT THEREFORE TO GOD. RESIST THE DEVIL AND HE WILL FLEE FROM YOU. (JAMES 4:7)*²²⁸

[In this passage the temptation is to cause conflict with others out of self-centered pride.]

147) The trustworthy One will supply His people with divine strength to withstand the temptations, persecutions, and oppressions of Satan

*BUT THE LORD IS FAITHFUL, AND HE WILL **STRENGTHEN** AND PROTECT YOU FROM THE EVIL ONE."*
(2ND THESSALONIANS 3:3)²²⁹

[In this passage God is allowing Satan (through wicked men) to attack Paul, Silas, and Timothy. This prompts Paul to ask the Thessalonians for prayer and to assure them that God will strengthen *them* to persevere in spiritual warfare.]

148) The faithful One will supply His people with divine protection from Satan's attacks

*BUT THE LORD IS FAITHFUL, AND HE WILL STRENGTHEN AND **PROTECT** YOU FROM THE EVIL ONE."*
(2ND THESSALONIANS 3:3)²³⁰

[In this passage God is allowing Satan (through wicked men) to attack Paul, Silas, and Timothy. This prompts Paul to ask the Thessalonians for prayer and to assure them that God will shield them from defeat at the hands of Satan's forces.]

149) God will restore and strengthen the believer whose faith remains immovable while suffering demonic assaults

*BE OF SOBER SPIRIT, BE ON THE ALERT. YOUR ADVERSARY, THE DEVIL, PROWLs AROUND LIKE A ROARING LION, SEEKING SOMEONE TO DEVOUR. BUT RESIST HIM, FIRM IN YOUR FAITH ... (AND) AFTER YOU HAVE SUFFERED FOR A LITTLE WHILE, THE GOD OF ALL GRACE, WHO CALLED YOU TO HIS ETERNAL GLORY IN CHRIST, WILL HIMSELF PERFECT, CONFIRM, STRENGTHEN, AND ESTABLISH YOU. (1ST PETER 5:8-10)*²³¹

APPENDIX B

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

HAS GOD EVER SAID “NO” TO YOU? (Pages 6-7)

This testimony concerns the pursuit of a career requiring a degree from a certain school.

- ? If you had been one of those whom I asked *to pray with me for my acceptance into that study program*, what advice (if any) would you have given me?

THE ELEMENTS OF FAITH (Pages 8-9)

Let's start with the basics. We read that faith always has three essential elements.

- ? What are they?
- ? What is the *object* of one's faith?
- ? What is the *content* of one's faith?
- ? What is the *amount* of one's faith?

The Object of Faith (Pages 10-14)

- ? What *should* be the Object of a believer's faith?

Gifted individuals ... programs and strategies ... materials and resources ... time ... money ... strength ... all these have been given to us to *use*. And God expects us to do so.

Your reading, however, made a distinction between *using* these gifts versus *trusting* in them. We are to depend upon God, not God's gifts, to carry out His will. Only the Spirit of God has the power to make an eternal impact in the eternal souls of men and women. Nothing "earthly" or man-generated can do that.

- ? How then can we keep this balance between using God's resources to the fullest (as faithful stewards of Christ) without placing our faith in them?

The Content of Faith (Pages 15-20)

- ? What *should* be the content of a believer's faith?
- ? What does it mean to "present one's requests placed upon an opened palm rather than held within a clenched fist"?

The Amount of Faith (Pages 21-22)

- ? What is the greatest amount of faith a believer needs to benefit from the promises of God?
- ? If a small amount of faith is all a believer needs to benefit from God's promises, what advantages does a *strong* faith have over a weak faith? (Why should we want to strengthen our faith?)

WHERE THE CONTENT OF OUR FAITH IS FOUND (Page 25)

It was said that the will of God is revealed in the Word of God.

- ? Why is the Word of God a more reliable authority for faith and practice than the *thoughts* or *feelings* that cross your mind?

- ? Why is the Word of God a more reliable authority for faith and practice than the teachings of your local church or denomination?

WHAT WE CAN TRUST GOD TO BE

The Unchanging Character of God (Pages 26-27)

In today's material we were encouraged to "*dismiss those thoughts* (that 'God has let us down') and stand firm, trusting Him to be what His Word insists that He is."

- ? How does one "dismiss a thought"?

WHAT WE CAN TRUST GOD TO DO

The Assured Promises of God (Pages 28-31)

It was said in your reading, "Waiting for God to do what He said He would do sometimes involves long-term patience." But the time spent waiting should not be time wasted. We should make the most of that priceless gift.

- ? What are some things we can do to live productive lives while "waiting on the Lord"?

WHAT WE CAN TRUST GOD TO DO

The Unfailing Prophecies of God (Pages 32-35)

God's blueprint for the future has not been fully revealed. Therefore, we are limited in what we *can* know. Nevertheless, we are responsible to pursue an understanding of those portions of His prophetic plan that have been shown to us. This understanding is only possible by the

clarifying ministry of the Holy Spirit. We must trust Him to help us “connect the dots” of Biblical prophecy (as much as possible). This, of course, demands much prayer.

Two reasons were given explaining why God wants us to know His will for the future.

One reason is “to motivate the believer to prepare himself to stand before God.” In 1st Corinthians 3:8-15 and 4:5, we are told that every believer faces an evaluation at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Our knowledge of this judgment will motivate us to prepare for this event.

? When we bow before Christ for this face-to-Face judgment, what will *not* be the subject of conversation?

? What *will* be the subject of conversation?

A second reason to study prophecy is “to fortify and reassure us as we face adversity.” Your reading mentioned three adversaries from which you will, one day in the future, be *fully and forever delivered*.

? What are these three opponents?

WHAT WE CAN TRUST GOD TO DO IN AND THROUGH US (Page 36)

? What are some ways God has given His people to participate with Him in the fulfillment of His will?

WHAT WE CAN TRUST GOD TO DO IN AND THROUGH US

As We Strengthen the Church of God (Pages 37-38)

The twelve apostles were entrusted with several different kinds of ministries to perform: to cast out demons, to heal every kind of disease and sickness, to preach the good news of the kingdom, to raise the dead, to cleanse the lepers (Matthew 11), and on two occasions to feed thousands of people (Matthew 14 and 15). Later, they would be entrusted with the Great

Commission (Matthew 28). These were ordinary men given extraordinary things to do. And they were given a few resources – if any at all (five barley loaves and two fish) – to use.

We, too, have been given several diverse ministries to perform: to share the Gospel with the lost, to pray, to use our spiritual gifts, to give financial and material resources to those in need, to fight our spiritual enemies with our spiritual battle gear, to name a few. We, too, are ordinary individuals. And we, too, are expected to do something extraordinary: *to have an eternal impact in the lives of those who need to know Christ as Savior and in the lives of our churches.*

As with the apostles, if we are going to have *an eternal impact* in the lives of others, something more is needed (in addition to personnel and resources) to carry out these supernatural responsibilities. And without it, we will fail as God's stewards.

? What is it?

WHAT WE CAN TRUST GOD TO DO IN AND THROUGH US

As We Radiate the Righteousness of God (Pages 39-42)

? What is God's moral will for your life?

Concerning this will, it was said that we all have a problem. His will is impossible for us to obey. Because of our sinful nature, we are too weak. It usually takes some failures in our lives before we can accept this truth. So, if someone has failed morally in the past, he has a golden opportunity to grow in Christlikeness.

? Why is that?

? Can you think of any promises in the Bible that assure us of God's sanctifying work?

WHAT WE CAN TRUST GOD TO DO IN AND THROUGH US

As We Apply the Wisdom of God (Pages 43-45)

I would like to ask for one or two volunteers for this part of our study. Think back to when you were faced with making a major decision.

- ? Would some of you be willing to tell us what decision you were facing and then walk us through the process you used? It may be that your testimony will help someone else work through a decision they are facing now.

WHAT TO DO WHEN WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

(1) Humbly submit to God's will in advance (Page 46)

Some Christians are skeptical about the goodness of God's will. They may even fear His plan. They do not *want* to pray, "Thy will be done" because He might change their own plans.

- ? What is the root problem here? What causes a believer to retreat from submitting his will to the will of God?
- ? Why does this problem exist?

WHAT TO DO WHEN WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

(2) Do not be hasty in your decision (Page 47)

- ? What can be lost if we rush into a decision?

WHAT TO DO WHEN WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

(3) Bathe your search in prayer (Page 47)

When the specifics of God's will have not been revealed to us, we were told in this section to "pray for (His) wisdom and guidance up front."

- ? Why do we believe God *can* give us wisdom and guidance? What has been revealed to us in the Scriptures that assures us that He has this ability to do so?

WHAT TO DO WHEN WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

(4) Search for God's wisdom from the Scriptures (Page 47)

Let's say you were thinking about starting your own business. So, you decide to search the Scriptures to discover what It says about business partners, cost of operation, going into debt, craftsmanship, work ethic, and such matters.

- ? How do you "search the Scriptures" to discover the wisdom God offers you about this topic?

WHAT TO DO WHEN WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

(5) Seek guidance from counselors who can support their advice from the Scriptures (Page 48)

- ? When you look for a counselor, what *credentials* should he or she have?

WHAT TO DO WHEN WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

(6) In view of your personal situation, decide which choice is best for you (Page 48)

We read, "Once we have done our research, it would be wise to set it aside for a time. Further insights may come."

- ? Why do you think putting aside your decision for a time might be difficult to do?

WHAT TO DO WHEN WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

**(7) Ask yourself the question,
“Which of these options, if any, do I *want* to do?” (Page 49)**

- ? If you agree that this *should* be a consideration, why do you think so? But if you do *not* agree that this should be a consideration, why not?

WHAT TO DO WHEN WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

(8) Make the decision, then take steps to accomplish it (Page 49)

All the steps we have taken so far have been to prepare us for this one. Each was necessary; but now it is time to “make the decision” and move forward. For some, it is this step that often causes the most distress.

- ? Why is that? What is it about this step that makes it so difficult for some?

WHAT TO DO WHEN WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

(9) While waiting, make the most of where you are and what you have (Page 49)

- ? Why do you think the Lord has us “wait upon Him” at times?

WHAT *NOT* TO DO WHEN WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

Do Not Expect Various Miracles of Communication (Pages 51-52)

Even thoughts that cross our minds cannot be trusted as being “the will of God.” (Unbelievers also have “thoughts that cross their minds.”) That is not to say these ideas should automatically be rejected since some of them are good and wise. Others, however, are unbiblical and foolish.

? How do you know which of your thoughts are worth pursuing as you seek God's will?

WHAT *NOT* TO DO WHEN WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

Do Not Put Out a Fleece (Pages 52-53)

? Can you think of any negative consequences in putting out a fleece?

WHAT *NOT* TO DO WHEN WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

Do Not View a Sense of Immediate Peace as a Confirmation of God's Will (Page 54)

It was said that "following one's heart can lead to disaster. Only the will of God can bring *lasting* peace."

It is possible for a person to realize (through the counsel of God's Word or God's people) that what he thought would bring him satisfaction and fulfillment is not God's will. Yet, that awareness does not remove the desire from his heart.

? Now what? What can he do to remove this deceptive desire from his heart?

HOW TO STRENGTHEN OUR FAITH IN GOD

By Reading (Hearing) the Word of God (Pages 55-57)

Through our study of the Scriptures, we come to know the *character of God*. He, of course, is the *Object* of our Faith. The better we know *Him*, the more trustworthy He becomes *to us*.

? Would someone like to read (or quote) his or her favorite verse of Scripture?

? What does that verse from the Bible teach you about God's *character*?

Through our study of the Scriptures, we also come to know the *will of God*. His will, of course, is the *content* of our faith. The better we know His will, the better we will know what to trust Him *for*.

? Would someone else like to read (or quote) his or her favorite verse of Scripture?

? What does that verse from the Bible teach you about God's *will*?

HOW TO STRENGTHEN OUR FAITH IN GOD

By Remembering the Works of God (Pages 57-58)

The level of one's spiritual maturity is directly proportionate to his level of faith. It is impossible to have one inch of faith ... and have one foot of spiritual maturity. This is true for the life of the individual believer as well as the life of a local church. If you wish to know the *level of faith* a church has, take a good look at their *level of spiritual maturity*.

? Since faith can be strengthened "by remembering the works of God," what could *a local church* do to cultivate faith in the lives of its people?

? How has God used *worldly people* to strengthen your faith?

? In view of this principle, what can *you* do to cultivate your own faith?