

DO YOU KNOW THE...



ELEMENTARY
TEACHINGS
ABOUT
CHRIST

RALPH E. JOHNSON

ELEMENTARY TEACHINGS ABOUT CHRIST

Ralph E. Johnson

Profound thanks to God for matchless grace that not only saves but sustains as we move toward maturity in becoming a suitable bride for Jesus.

Deepest appreciation to my wife Sylvia, my best friend and most faithful supporter, for her help and encouragement in preparing this book.

All Scripture passages are taken from the New International Version of the Bible unless other-wise specified.

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Prologue

In January of 2005, I was invited to speak to a group of men at a local church about baptism in the Holy Spirit. As they were unfamiliar with the spiritual gifts manifested through those baptized in the Spirit, I shared several personal experiences revealing God's power working through those so baptized.

Denominations calling themselves Bible-based promote doctrines that the days of signs, wonders and miraculous healings are past. Such a distortion of truth ignores world-wide experience wherein cripples walk, the blind see, and the dead are raised to life.

Some evangelicals even insist that influence of demons on true believers isn't possible. Meanwhile a number of denominations once birthed out of revival admit sexual perverts into their ordained ministry and promote cheap grace across America.

The Church has fallen into doctrinal disarray and a culture of materialism has overtaken our nation. The young are indoctrinated to seek success such that we see youth so pushed to succeed that many come to believe they can't measure up.

Filled with frustration, they turn to drugs and drink to escape the pressure. Many sink into despair and the Church fails to deal with their cry for help in an effective way. It is hardly surprising that depression and suicide are ever increasing.

The morning after meeting with this group of men, I was thinking of the desperate need for revival. My spirit was heavy over the pathetic witness of the Church on a society that usually reacts to the gospel with more taunts than transformation.

As I was reading Hebrews 6, the Holy Spirit impressed on me that one major reason for the state of the Church is the lack of a solid foundation based on the teachings about Jesus listed in the first two verses of this chapter.

“Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.”

The next day I called the group leaders to say I wished to expand the teaching to include all of these subjects. Over the next two months, we studied what Hebrews 6 refers to as *elementary* (having a position of authority) *teachings* about Christ.

It quickly became obvious these men were not familiar with the teachings despite most having had a prolonged history of church attendance. This book presents the same teachings and I pray it will deepen your understanding of doctrines which God says are foundational if we are to go on to maturity.

Jesus told a group of Sadducees they were in error because they didn't know the Scriptures or the power of God. This is true of many believers today! You may well find yourself reading new information or things in conflict with past teachings.

Be like the Bereans and search the Scriptures for confirmation of what is said in these pages. Also ask the Holy Spirit to open your spiritual eyes as you read. Then after finishing the book, I suggest that you consider the following questions:

a) Have I applied God's demand for repentance to my own life by removing all known strongholds?

b) Is my faith like that of Abraham in that I trust the Lord not only with today but with all my tomorrows?

c) Was I water baptized with full understanding that my old self is crucified in order to live a new life?

d) Have I persevered in seeking the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit?

e) Do I welcome refining in my trials to become a holy and blameless bride for Christ?

f) Am I aware of need to be cautious in laying on of hands on other people?

g) Do I strive to live as a stranger and alien on earth so I might stand before God someday without shame?

Chapter One:

**REPENTANCE
FROM
ACTS THAT LEAD
TO DEATH**

Chapter One:

Repentance from acts that lead to death

I'm often asked about the best place to start reading the Bible. Scripture doesn't say, so I suggest the gospels that describe the life and ministry of Jesus. Another question has to do with which teachings are of greatest priority. These are listed for us in Hebrews 6:1,2 and cover the usual experience from the sinner's first response to conviction of sin until final judgment that leads into eternity.

These verses exhort us to go on to maturity in Christ after laying down a foundation that consists of certain teachings listed in a very specific order. We'll see how critical these teachings are as well as their order as we proceed. We begin with ***repentance from acts that lead to death***, and first must define what is meant by repentance before we proceed.

This is extremely important since a new gospel has crept into the Church. In certain ways it's like the original gospel, and it even uses some of the same language. But it departs from truth in a way that often deceives those not well grounded. To understand the meaning of repentance strikes at the very center of this deceptive gospel.

The Pharisees during Jesus' time of earth were satisfied with a form of religion. Jesus explained that no one wants new wine (the gospel) after drinking old wine (Judaism) because "*the old is better*" (Luke 5:39). This phrase literally means "the old is good enough." That's how many feel after hearing a new gospel they consider good enough.

Old-time religion is often considered irrelevant because times have changed. Religion must be made relevant which actually means it's not acceptable for conversion to be a culture shock. What's happened to repentance is similar to the manner in which vaccines are made to immunize people against disease.

The virus causing flu is damaged so it will not cause severe sickness after injection. Still it's able to produce immunity so the body has resistance when the real virus comes along. It's like that in the Church. The new gospel immunizes many such that they resist the teachings of Jesus about repentance.

The Lutheran martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls this new gospel "cheap grace." It's easy to accept since it doesn't cost anyone his comfort, let alone his life. Most in the ministry don't even realize they preach a form of cheap grace. They simply repeat what's taught in a majority of seminaries and bible colleges today.

This new gospel offers people forgiveness and salvation without requiring *repentance from acts that lead to death*. Just believe Jesus died for your sins, say a prayer and be saved. It's distortion of Scripture and

deserves to be utterly condemned. Yet it's heard from pulpits across the breadth of America.

Jesus was adamant about repentance. *"Unless you repent, you will all perish"* (Luke 13:3). To repent was the first thing he taught at the start of his ministry (Mark 1:15). It was the first thing disciples preached as they were sent out two by two: *"They went out and preached that people should repent"* (Mark 6:12).

When anxious sinners asked what they must do to be saved at Pentecost, they were instructed to repent for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). Later Paul told men of Athens that God *"commands all people every-where to repent"* (Acts 17:30).

Many think they're saved but never repented. One doesn't get saved to repent; one must repent to get saved. Some think repentance is the confession of sins, but that only tells God what He already knows.

Others consider being sorry as repentance, but that isn't true either. Nor is stopping sin by sheer will-power the same as true repentance. We're given better insight into the meaning of repentance by Paul.

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Two types of sorrow are described here. One is sorrow for having to suffer consequences due to bad

decisions. “I’m sorry I got caught and have to pay the price.” Paul calls sorrow for the consequences of sin worldly sorrow. It has absolutely nothing to do with genuine repentance and brings nothing but death, i.e., condemnation by God.

Godly sorrow bringing repentance is different. The Greek *metanaeo* translated repent literally means the change of one’s mind. Not only does godly sorrow bring turning away from acts that lead to death. There is no regret which literally means that repentance is irrevocable. It cannot be undone.

The reason repentance can’t be revoked is that there’s been such a change of mind. This is what the apostle describes in the next verse (7:11).

See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done.

A saved person doesn’t look at past behavior with desire to return. The change in attitude is so great that there’s alarm and concern over what’s been done. Old ways are viewed with disgust, not desire. Godly sorrow that brings repentance leaves one with hatred over what has been done, never longing to once again indulge the sinful nature. As Scripture says, the old has gone, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17).

There's eagerness to clear oneself, the Greek for clear being *apologia*. We are apologetic over past actions and long to never repeat. Instead we're ready to see that justice is done. If one finds himself desiring the old lifestyle, it usually indicates that repentance is absent.

Repentance involves more than turning away from sinful acts like sexual immorality or addictions. To depend on attendance at church or other religious activities for salvation is equally serious. We are never saved by our works, no matter how noble they might appear to us or others.

The only means for salvation comes through unmerited favor of God called grace. And grace is only available to those who place their faith in Jesus Christ because of His finished work at Calvary and resurrection from the dead (Romans 10:9; Ephesians 2:8,9).

Nonetheless we must recognize that repentance is essential. There are certain things only God can do, and others for which man is responsible. While grace inclines the heart to repent, God will not repent for us. And many who profess the name of Jesus have never genuinely repented.

For this reason there's little difference between their lives and that of the unchurched in behavior. The teaching that *all is done by Jesus* causes multitudes to believe repentance is unnecessary. Accountability for behavior becomes ignored and grace is turned into a license for sinning.

We're given a conscience as a spiritual alarm system. When we fail to live as God desires, the alarm bells ring. There's no peace or joy. Only frustration, anxiety and depression. Many turn to alcohol, drugs, food, tobacco, gambling or sex as an escape.

Still there's no serenity. There's an absence of *shalom*, a Hebrew word meaning harmony and peace in all areas of life. In Genesis we read how shalom was disrupted on earth. God had warned man to not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Any tree was fine, but not that one! "*For when you eat of it, you will surely die*" (Genesis 2:17). What we must appreciate is that God ends this warning with a period. But in the next chapter, Satan replaces this period with a question mark.

Did God really say "*You must not eat from any tree in the garden?*" (3:1). We joke about who's to blame, Adam or Eve. Yet we test God in exactly the same way. We replace periods with question marks of our own if we're honest about it.

When Adam disobeyed God, a loss of shalom affected all of creation. First came the loss of intimate relationship between man and God. God came to the garden for a visit where Adam said, "*I heard you in the garden and I was afraid*" (3:10).

Personal relationships were affected. God told Eve her husband would rule over her; there'd be strife in marriage. Relationship between man and nature was also disrupted, and thus it was God said to Adam,

*“Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil will you eat of it
all the days of your life” (3:17).*

However God had a plan for restoring shalom through a Lamb slain from the foundation of the earth. By His finished work at Calvary, Jesus would bring total redemption: forgiveness for sin, healing for sickness, and resurrection from death.

Now we can experience shalom, but man has a role called *repentance*. God has done what we can never do and it's available to us by grace. Yet we don't reduce the glory of grace one bit by respecting God's demand for repentance.

We're never to change God's message; it's to change us and it begins with repentance. The response of a sinner must be to repent. But turn (*repent*) or burn (*perish*) is not a favored type of preaching today. Most see it as far too confrontational.

As a result, many try to begin their spiritual life without repentance and end up lifeless as well as joy-less. Before returning to heaven, Jesus said disciples would go out to preach “*repentance and forgiveness of sins*” (Luke 24:47).

They were faithful to do exactly that. As Peter told a crowd, “*Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out...and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus*” (Acts 3:19).

His message began with the demand to repent. Amos describes how serious God is about repentance. People worshiped and brought sacrifices, yet continued to sin. God brought famine, drought and plagues, but still they didn't repent (Amos 4:6-10).

Today we're so like Israel in the days of Amos. Many confess sins and tell God they're sorry but never repent. That's what I did for years, deceived by cheap grace that never demanded repentance. But there were many times I regretted my behavior.

Now I realize my sorrow was what the Bible calls worldly. I was sorry for the consequences of bad decisions. But as pressure eased, I returned to my old ways just as Proverbs 26:11 tells: *"As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly."*

When salvation is offered without the demand to repent and explanation as to what that means, those with worldly sorrow are deceived. They hear a false gospel. Told they can be saved if they would confess being a sinner and ask Jesus to save them, it results in their stopping short of repentance. It's such a terrible deception and happens all the time!

It's understandable why followup of first-time commitments shows more than 50% no longer attend any church within two years. I've seen so many say a sinner's prayer and be welcomed as saved. But having failed to repent, they disappear in unsaved condition within a short time or continue to attend church while living as hypocrites as I did for years.

Reducing the gospel to *confess and believe* is not the message of Jesus. Leaving out His demand to repent not only misleads sinners. It misrepresents God who commands all men everywhere to repent.

When John the Baptist told men to repent as preparation for the Messiah, he was telling them what repentance does; it prepares the way to receive Jesus as we'll see in the next chapter.

Some claim men sin because they cannot help it. This justifies sin instead of treating it for what it is, namely rebellion against the will of God. They imply sinners aren't lost because they sin but because they haven't accepted Jesus.

To claim man's only problem is *not coming to Christ* ignores responsibility for conduct. We'll look at this further when we come to the subject of eternal judgment. But telling people they only need to con-fess their sins and accept Jesus is deceitful.

Jude warns that godless men have slipped in among us, and are changing the grace of God into a license for immorality. He urges that we be careful to contend for the true gospel and not endorse what is counterfeit.

Godless men are found everywhere, failing to emphasize need for repentance. They imply that grace involves such mercy that even *deliberate unrepented sin* is forgiven and entrance to heaven stays insured, even for those who continue to live in sin.

Paul exhorts us, *“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith”* (2 Corinthians 13:5). Ask yourselves, “Have I repented or did I only ask Jesus to save me? Have I really turned from sinful acts and dead works, or did I just ask God to forgive me while I continue doing the same evil things?”

If we haven’t repented, Jesus warns that we’ll perish. No man dare change what Jesus says without embracing a grave risk. Realizing this, Paul writes to the Church in Galatia,

“Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned.” Galatians 1:7-9

The road to eternal life involves repentance as a lifestyle, not just as a one-time decision. As the Holy Spirit carries out His sanctifying work, areas in our life are revealed that need to be changed such as self-centeredness or failure to forgive others.

At one time, I had extreme affection for golf and boating. Many hours were spent with one or the other weekly. When Christ became my Lord, it was clear my priority was to be helping the handicapped, not trying to improve my golf handicap.

I was to be a *fisher-of-men*, not spend endless hours on my boat. In time, both golf clubs and boat

were gone. As our spiritual eyes are opened, we joy-fully set aside many distractions to do whatever is of glory to our Blessed Savior.

Should we stumble, repentance is necessary, and God is always faithful to forgive if we're ready to be cleansed of our unrighteousness (1 John 1:8-10). We must build our lives on the practice of repentance if we're ever to mature in Christ.

Zacchaeus collected far more taxes than was required and became wealthy in the process. But after meeting Jesus, godly sorrow brought him repentance and this tax collector had a profound change of mind as a result.

“Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount” (Luke 19:8).

He didn't just say, “I confess that I've sinned.” His heart had changed and in repentance he knew that amends must be made. With this Jesus said, *“Today salvation has come to this house.”* It was repentance that led to the salvation of Zacchaeus.

Jesus says, *“Repent! Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me”* (Revelation 3:19,20).

The door to intimate fellowship with Jesus is opened by the key of repentance. This is why the first elementary teaching about Christ is that of repentance from acts that lead to death.

The teachings listed in Hebrews 6:1,2 aren't simply about doctrines. They're *about Christ* and the relationship were to have with Him. Let's never lose sight of that as we proceed.

I'd ask a question here. Do you enjoy a lust of the flesh or eyes, or entertain pride over what you do or possess? John tells us such comes from the world and not from the Father in heaven.

Is it worth the consequences for all of eternity should your life suddenly end and you've steadfastly refused to repent of loving the world and things of the world instead of seeking what God loves?

Don't allow yourself to be deceived. God can't be mocked. We're going to reap what we sow. If there is need for repentance, don't harden your heart.

Repent! This very moment! Today is the day of salvation. Don't let it pass if you hear the voice of God speaking to your heart.

Chapter Two:
FAITH IN GOD

Chapter Two:

Faith in God

Many of us have been told God will accept us just as we are, but that isn't true. The Bible says God accepts those who fear Him and do what is right (Acts 10:35). But God does give us permission to approach Him just as we are with certain conditions.

One of these is having a repentant heart, what is called a broken and contrite spirit (Psalm 51:17). Sin serves to separate us from God, the nature of sin being to deliberately rebel against the known will of God as He has revealed it to us through His Word.

God demands that we repent of our rebellion by turning from acts that lead to death. This is the first elementary teaching about Christ. Unless we repent, true fellowship with Jesus is simply not possible.

Repentance deserves far more emphasis than usually given, but we must not think repentance saves anyone. Repentance simply moves one into a position to be saved. So it was John the Baptist called Israel to *prepare* for the Messiah by repenting.

Salvation takes place only by the undeserved favor of God called grace. And the second step to be accepted by God is a human response to grace known as *faith*. In fact it's not possible to please God apart from this response called faith (Hebrews 11:6).

Jesus preached, *“Repent and believe the good news.”* First repent, then have faith. We’re never told to have faith without repentance. Paul emphasized the same order: *“I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus”* (Acts 20:21).

Faith is translated from the same Greek word that means to believe in a way so that action follows. This is why James and Paul emphasize the importance of faith expressed through action (Galatians 5:6; James 2:17,26). Yet even faith depends in part on grace.

Ephesians 2:8 tells us, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from your-selves, it is the gift of God.”* Faith is a gift of God that cannot be earned. A measure of faith comes to those who repent. Yet God cannot believe for us. It’s a gift we must accept and then put into action.

So what is faith? One thing it’s not is just to accept a fact. Many say they believe Jesus lived, died, and rose again. But it never produces change in their lives. It’s one thing to believe a fact and something else to have it change a person’s life.

Hebrews 11 is the famous chapter on faith, and the first two verses tell us *“Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.”* Thus faith involves a hope that acts like an anchor during life.

Faith isn't "I sure hope things work out." It's having sure confidence in truth revealed in the Word of God. It's being certain about that which is invisible, eternal, and unchanging rather than what is visible, temporary and changeable.

The carnal mind only accepts what the senses experience. "I only believe what I can see" kind of thinking. But when we can see something, faith is no longer needed. Faith and sight are exactly the opposite of one another.

Here again we find that a new gospel has crept into the Church. Many are extremely deceived about the meaning of faith as applied to salvation. Very few things distort truth like the "easy to believe" salvation so widely promoted today.

Such an approach has been adopted by many evangelicals. I've listened to "Just believe in Jesus!" preaching for years without hearing what saving faith is all about. So let's see what light the Bible sheds on the subject of faith that saves.

There was a time when I tried to understand faith by reading books on theology. It only confused me. Faith couldn't be that complicated if unschooled men did the same miracles as Jesus. And I wondered why the ancients were *commended* by God?

They found God's approval by their faith, so I asked God to help me understand what that meant.

The answer was to examine the life of Abraham who Paul calls the *father of those who believe*. A review of his life showed me five characteristics of his faith.

God told Abraham to leave his country, people and father's household for a new land. God promised to make a great nation of his descendants and bless all people on earth through him. And at age 75, Abram left as the Lord had told him (Genesis 12: 4). So we see **the first characteristic of his faith is obedience.**

Obedience unites doctrines of repentance and faith. It's so critical a part of faith that Paul describes his apostleship as calling men to obedience that comes from faith (Romans 1:5). Abraham leaving as the Lord said also showed repentance. Going to a new place in Christ requires leaving old ways behind.

A deadly spiritual virus infects the Church. It has corrupted what Paul teaches about faith that led him to write, *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me"* (Galatians 2: 20). Paul died daily to the world and flesh to have an exchange of life he calls being *"in Christ."*

Paul was so indebted to Jesus that he not only went **to** the cross for salvation; he got **on** the cross to identify with his Lord and Savior. How different than the testimony of those who simply say *"I've accepted Christ."* The question we should ask is, *"Have I truly had an exchange of lives? Am I in Christ?"*

Paul's passion for Jesus never allowed him to backslide. He pressed forward and said we should see things as He did. But exchanging lives isn't embraced today, nor is it even taught. Instead we choose to add a bit of Jesus to our old way of life.

Jesus says unless we lose our life for His sake, we'll lose our life for eternity. We must deny self and take up a cross daily to be a true disciple. Jesus tells us to consider the cost before deciding to follow Him, lest we find the cost too great along the way.

Dying to the old life so Christ can live within is almost avoided like a plague. As a result, the gospel of today is not "good news" for vile sinners, addicts, adulterers, homosexuals, and those obsessed with the desire for worldly possessions.

Preaching focuses on saving souls from hell, though the Bible seldom mentions such. On the other hand, being saved from the world and self is spoken of several hundred times. As a result we not only have a prodigal world. The Church itself is prodigal.

Abraham *left as the Lord told him*. His was a faith where obedience followed. That's the practical definition of the Greek noun *pistis* translated as faith. It's belief where obedient action follows. But so many evangelicals have confused the matter because they identify obedience with trying to achieve salvation by works.

In an effort to escape the error of salvation by works, they've adopted the error of salvation without obedience. Faith and obedience are never in conflict. Each is without value when separated from the other. Obedience without faith is legalism, and faith without obedience is dead and not the faith of Abraham.

Like repentance, faith has both inner and outer aspects. The inner is a heart change called *submission*, the outer aspect *obedience*. Many claim to work for the Lord, but God looks for those to serve obediently. It's one thing to be called out by God, and something else to sell out like Elisha.

Elijah was told by God to anoint Elisha as a prophet to follow him. Elijah went from where he was and found Elisha plowing with twelve yoke of oxen and himself driving the twelfth pair.

Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. "Let me kiss my father and mother good-bye," he said, "and then I will come with you."

So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.

1 Kings 19:19-21

Elisha responded obediently, and was willing to *separate* from anything that might tempt him to go back. He burned bridges by slaughtering his oxen and using plowing equipment as firewood. Like Abraham, he was willing to leave home and family just as we're asked to leave whatever might hinder the purposes of God for our lives.

This is why Abraham was commended by the Lord for his faith. James says, *"Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did...You see that his faith and his actions were working together and his faith was made complete by what he did. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone"* (James 2:21,22,24).

Faith without obedience is not the faith of a man called the father of those believe in Christ. There are some who call themselves fundamental Christians, yet disown the above verses and even protest the book of James because obedience is so closely connected to faith that is saving.

Some years ago, I took a white-water raft trip with my son Philip down rapids in Georgia. The drive to the launch site was along the river and our courage melted as we watched many canoes and rafts capsize. Fortunately, however, we'd arranged to have a guide escort us and at the launch site, his very first step was to review the commands we were to follow.

After putting on life jackets and helmets, we practiced in quiet water until we were able to respond quickly to directions. Then we pushed out into a series of rapids. We not only made it down the river; there wasn't a single spill. It was the result of obedience to instructions of our guide!

Those with obedient faith will always make it down life's rapids as well. Jesus not only remains at our side at all times. He gives us strength, courage and does much of the paddling during rough times. Our responsibility is simply to obey.

As Jesus tells us, *"Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."* (Matthew 7:21). The key here? Obedience!

But obedience at the start of the journey is not enough. This brings us to **a second characteristic of Abraham's faith, that of perseverance**. Faith must hold firm when life is beset by trials or when God's promises seem slow in taking place.

Abraham was promised many descendants but circumstances were saying the opposite. He was aging and years passed before the Lord spoke to him again after initially telling Abraham he'd have a son.

After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. "Do not be afraid Abram, I am your shield and very great reward."

But Abram said, “O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain child-less and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus.”

And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”

Then the word of the Lord came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.”

He took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

Abram believed the LORD, and he credit-ed it to him as righteousness.

Genesis 15:1-6

This last verse is often used in teaching about faith, yet its context is rarely explained. It wasn't just a moment of faith that was credited as righteousness. Abram and his wife were well past child-bearing age, yet his faith had remained firm.

When Abraham is said to have believed, the Hebrew **aman** translated *believed* literally means to persevere in trust. Abraham looked past what seemed hopeless to believe God for a son from his own body. Even as years passed, his faith did not waver.

Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.”

Romans 4:19-22

Abraham had reasons to question a son being born, yet he persevered in faith. He chose to believe God’s promise and not the circumstances. ***We need to realize it was persevering faith that was credited as righteousness to Abraham,*** not just momentary faith as so often implied.

It was faith that didn’t waver in what seemed an impossible situation that was credited to Abraham as righteousness. In my entire life I’ve not once heard this emphasized in all the times I’ve heard preaching about salvation.

The Church is weakened by the idea, “Believe today and be saved forever!” Malformed believers are the result of distorting the meaning of faith. It’s cheap grace and the Church is filled with it today. Faith must persevere for one to be called a child of Abraham and be saved (Matthew 24:13).

Trials will come to test our faith and to prove faith genuine (1 Peter 1: 6,7). I was treated for a rather aggressive cancer fifteen years ago. Only a year later the cancer recurred, but God gave me a ***rapha*** word while reading about Jesus approaching the disciples in a storm on the sea of Galilee (Matthew 14:22-32).

It was a simple message: *“Trust with your whole heart and you’ll walk on water as Peter did at first after getting out of his boat. Keep your eyes on me or you’ll sink just like Peter when he let himself become distracted by the waves.”*

For years tests have shown steady progression of cancer, yet I’ve been protected by the Lord from all symptoms. After forty years of practice in oncology, I’m hardly in denial. But I’ve avoided seeking treatment of any kind while persevering in faith.

By grace I’ve not had one moment of anxiety. I can’t focus on God’s promise and on medical reports at the same time and still feel like a child of Abraham. Walking by faith doesn’t leave a lot of room to focus on the waves we encounter in life.

Abraham’s faith is contrary to the antinomian spirit affecting the Church today, just as it plagued the early church. *It’s the idea we’re saved by faith so it doesn’t matter what we do as long as our beliefs are correct.* It almost seems at times that divorce is final between belief and behavior in America.

The doctrine of grace is so distorted by certain ministers that Paul would be indignant were he alive. But words he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit are alive: *“Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?”* (Romans 6:1,2).

God’s demand to be holy is ignored by those who preach “Just say the sinner’s prayer and accept Christ!” Such preaching gained popularity after the 1st World War and continues. Sinners aren’t lost because of sin, but because they haven’t accepted Jesus.

It’s the heresy sin won’t condemn after saying a prayer and ignores responsibility for conduct after accepting Jesus. One is no longer required to repent, obey, persevere, or have a fear of God. This brings us to **the third characteristic of Abraham’s faith which is fear of the Lord.**

Severe testing of faith lay ahead for Abraham. He found himself told by God to sacrifice his long-awaited son as a burnt offering. Leaving the next day, his son carried firewood while Abraham carried the fire and a knife (Genesis 22:3-6).

When Isaac asked about an offering, his father answered, *“God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering”* (Genesis 22:8). This foretells a future day when God would provide His Son as a sacrifice at the very place Abraham was told to sacrifice Isaac.

After reaching Moriah, Abraham bound his son and laid him on a wood altar. Then he picked up the knife to slay Isaac. Just about to plunge the knife into the heart of his son, Abraham heard God speak the following words:

*“Do not lay a hand on the boy...**now I know that you fear God**, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”*

Genesis 22:12 (emphasis mine)

How little attention we give to these words! The love, mercy and grace of God are proclaimed so exclusively that fear of the Lord is all but forgotten. I cannot recall these words about Abraham fearing the Lord ever given emphasis from a pulpit.

Don't miss the point! The faith of Abraham included **godly fear**, a principle sounded repeatedly in the Bible. The psalmist warns that sin abounds when there is no fear of the Lord.

Fear of the Lord is called beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10) and man avoids evil through fear of the Lord (Proverbs 16:6). Noah built the ark *in holy fear* to escape the judgment of God that was coming upon the earth (Hebrews 11:7).

When God came down on Mount Sinai to give Israel the law, it was with display of power. There was thunder, lightening, a trumpet blast and the mountain trembled violently, causing the people to fear.

Moses said, “*God has come to test you so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning*” (Exodus 20:20). Fear of the Lord might even be called 20:20 spiritual vision.

Jesus tells us, “*I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear. Fear him who, after killing the body, has power to throw you into hell*” (Luke 12:4,5).

Paul tells us to work out our salvation in fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). Abraham dared not hold back sacrificing even his precious son out of holy fear. Fear kept this man of faith sensitive to obeying God’s will for his life.

In these last days, we’ve adopted a gospel that doesn’t offend, a gospel that allows priorities to get out of order without fear of consequences. God refers to greed as idolatry, yet prosperity is preached from a majority of pulpits across America.

What a contrast to Abraham. Fear of the Lord did not permit anything, not even what was dearest above all else (his long-awaited son) to be an obstacle to his faith remaining obedient.

A fourth characteristic of Abraham’s faith is love of God as seen in this same passage about testing that took place on Moriah. Told to sacrifice his son, a

question facing Abraham was whether or not his love for God was greater than for Isaac. What a severe test of faith this must have posed!

Abraham didn't fail the test. His faith trusted the faithfulness of God and his love for God exceeded love for anything or anyone else. In fact, Jesus says having love for God is directly related to whether or not we are obedient.

Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him (John 14:21).

When Paul says we're to "*live by faith, not by sight,*" the literal translation of the Greek translated *live by faith* is to conduct one's life by faith. Doing so with the love of God is vital to the Christian life.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (Galatians 5:5,6).

The apostle is telling us that obedience in good works and even perseverance in works is not enough. Even if we give all we possess to the poor and surrender our bodies to the flames but have not love, we'll gain nothing (1 Corinthians 13:3).

Faith that is saving can't help being expressed through deeds done out of love instead of done to fulfill the expectations of others. Deeds done other than from a heart of love is legalism and is unacceptable in the eyes of heaven.

The fifth characteristic of Abraham's faith is hope which brings us full circle to where we started. Faith is being sure of what we *hope* for. In certain ways, hope ties together the other characteristics of faith.

When our hope is in Christ instead of success, popularity or even health, it's far easier to persevere in obedience. Hope also promotes fear of the Lord as well as love.

Because of hope we're willing to live as aliens and strangers on earth, looking forward to eternity in our heavenly home. This was a characteristic of faith in all those whom God commended for their faith.

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised: they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. They admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.

We'll never receive all of God's promises on this side of glory. But with hope coming from faith, we'll never lose our peace and joy, even in trials. So

again we come to Paul's exhortation: "*Examine your-selves to see whether you are in the faith.*"

Is your faith like Abraham's? Are you being obedient in using your time, talents and treasures for the kingdom of heaven?

Do you have faith that perseveres when trials come along, knowing with sure confidence that God uses these times to draw you closer?

Do you have fear of the Lord that causes you to tremble at the thought of bringing shame on Jesus' name or to His body the Church?

Is your faith so filled with hope of heaven that God isn't ashamed to be called your Father? Are you living as an alien and stranger on earth?

Faith that saves isn't just a one-time decision to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior after repenting of acts that lead to death. That's but a start for a lifelong race to be run to the finish (1 Corinthians 9:24).

May we never shrink back from the challenge of living as those *in Christ*. While doing so certainly depends on grace, we're responsible for not receiving grace in vain (2 Corinthians 6:1).

Chapter Three:

**DOCTRINE OF
BAPTISMS**

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Doctrine of Baptisms

Hebrews speaks of instruction about baptisms so it's clear there's more than one baptism. In fact we find four baptisms described in the New Testament, three of which apply to life *in Christ*. But let's begin with the word *baptism* itself.

Baptism is a word never translated to English from the Greek. The Greek word *baptizo* was altered to baptize by replacing the 'o' with an 'e' in the early 1600's when the Bible was translated into English by the authority of King James.

Greek *baptizo* had a single meaning for at least five centuries before Jesus' birth. The meaning was to totally immerse or cover in fluid. However the Church of England had continued a Roman practice of infant baptism by sprinkling of water and King James didn't want to have controversy with bishops with whom he already had a fragile peace.

To have translated the word *baptizo* into its English equivalent of *immerse* would have created a firestorm of debate over the usual practice of sprinkling newborn infants instead of immersing professing believers. And that was a debate which James wanted to avoid at any cost.

Before discussing how infant baptism started, let's first examine two other baptisms. Then we'll be able to recognize the significance of what happened in the 3rd century A.D. when infant baptism began during the rule of the emperor Constantine.

The first baptism is that of John the Baptist who *came baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins* (Mark 1:4). John's ministry was that of calling people to prepare for coming of the Messiah. People were immersed in the Jordan as a sign of sins washed away following repentance.

John's baptism was not the same as Christian baptism. Paul asked the disciples he met in Ephesus if they'd received the Holy Spirit. They said they hadn't heard of the Holy Spirit, whereupon Paul asked what baptism they received. When they answered, "*John's baptism*," Paul proceeded to baptize them in the name of Jesus (Acts 19:5).

While John's baptism of repentance isn't used today, the principle behind it is still relevant. A person must prepare to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior by repentance of acts that lead to death.

The baptism often referred to as water baptism was ordained by Jesus. When He went to be baptized by John in the Jordan, but it wasn't because of a need to repent or be forgiven as He was sinless. Jesus tells

us the reason as follows: *“It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness”* (Matthew 3:15).

The Greek translated *fulfill* means bringing to completion. Immersion is an outward sign of the inner death to self that has already taken place by faith. It completes righteousness Paul refers to as putting the “old man” to death for new life in Christ.

Immersion under the water is saying, *“I have repented of acts that lead to death and placed my faith in Jesus. The old person I was is buried with Christ in death. Old things have passed away so that I might live a new life in Jesus who is my Lord and Savior.”*

Coming out of the water is saying, *“I’m a new person. I’m resurrected to live in newness of life for the glory of God. Hold me accountable if you see me do anything that brings shame on the name of Jesus or on His body the Church.”*

Scripture defines two conditions before one is baptized in water. These follow the first two teachings about Christ. The first is repentance. When the crowd listened to Peter at Pentecost, they fell under conviction and cried out, *“What shall we do?”*

Peter replied, *“**Repent and be baptized**, every one of you, in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins”* (Acts 2:38, my emphasis). Anyone who has failed to repent of acts that lead to death should never mock God by being baptized in water.

Jesus gives the second condition for baptism. *“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever **believes and is baptized** will be saved”* (Mark 16:15,16, emphasis mine).

Those desiring baptism must have placed their genuine faith in Jesus. These two conditions are in full accord with Jesus’ words at the start of His ministry: *“Repent and believe the good news”* (Mark 1:15).

Clearly water baptism for infants is ruled out by these conditions. Some would contend that stories of household salvation provide justification for infant baptism, so let’s examine the two instances of this in the New Testament.

One is that of the Gentile centurion Cornelius. Acts 10 tells that Cornelius and his family were God-fearing and that all listened to Peter as the gospel was shared. None could have been infants in a true sense of being God-fearing or listening with understanding.

The second case concerns a Philippian jailer in Acts 16. All in his family were said to believe, so they again were mature enough to understand the meaning of the gospel. Neither example supports a contention that either family included infants.

How then did infant baptism begin? In the 3rd century A.D., the pagan Roman emperor Constantine was supposedly converted to Christ. With the intent of converting the world, infant baptism started and a

ritual lacking biblical basis was made the means for salvation. The scriptural conditions for water baptism were replaced by a *tradition of men*.

During Constantine's reign, other pagan rites never part of the apostolic Church came into practice. These included ornamental robes for priests, candles, holy water, statues and worship of relics. All of these continue as traditions in parts of the Church today.

Once infant baptism became established, the spiritual meaning of water baptism by immersion was changed. No longer did baptism fulfill or complete an inward righteousness already existing by faith.

No longer was water baptism an indication of covenant commitment to the lordship of Jesus. As a result, many are ignorant of the spiritual significance when immersed in water today.

I've watched people baptized who have never repented of acts that lead to death. They were simply encouraged to "*follow the Lord*" and went through baptism without any examination of their lives.

Water baptism is intended to identify a person with the death and burial of Jesus. It's to be testimony of having repented and the old man having been put to death by faith.

Resurrection life (new life) can't exist unless it comes out of death and Paul expresses this truth in the following words (Romans 6:1-4):

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead...we too may live a new life.

Many who are baptized today fail to see their old self as crucified and no being longer a slave to sin (Romans 6:6). They confess sins but commit the same acts again and again, not realizing that grace produces death to sin and a new life lived to righteousness.

Most religion today has little in common with deliverance from sin's power through faith in Jesus' finished work. If we take advantage of grace, we are dead to sin. If we're not dead to sin, then we're not really taking advantage of grace.

Water baptism is to be seen as entering waters of death to the old person. Exiting the water is to be seen as resurrection into new life in Christ. Anything less is but a pale shadow of what baptism is intended to represent.

Does that mean it's impossible for a Christian to sin? Of course not! But through grace, *those born again are no longer slaves to sin*. While not living in

sinless perfection, they can live blamelessly, free of deliberate sin against revealed truth. A believer may occasionally lapse from God's standard, but will not continue to sin as a lifestyle.

Is blameless living possible? Paul said of him-self, Silas and Timothy, "*You are witnesses and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed*" (1 Thessalonians 2:10). He is saying even God witnessed their holy, righteous and blameless lives among those in Thessalonica.

There's no truth of more practical importance than appreciating the victorious life available through the death and resurrection *of Christ* together with our death and resurrection *in Christ*. Yet it's a truth about which there is great ignorance.

Water baptism is not valid without intent to live in newness of life. Otherwise it's like the army of Egypt entering the Red Sea. Baptism will not save; it will destroy. Anyone with besetting sin **must be told to repent** before water baptism.

Finally, water baptism isn't optional. There is not a single example in Acts where someone believed without being baptized. It's not some kind of *extra*. Jesus says all are to be baptized, and not doing so is an act of deliberate rebellion.

The **third baptism** is one Jesus calls ***baptism with (or in) the Holy Spirit*** (Acts 1:5). This baptism is

of such importance that it gains early mention in all gospels. When John the Baptist was approached by those who wondered if he might be the Messiah, he replied with near identical words in each gospel:

“I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire”
(Luke 3:16).

Under the new covenant, God contracted with His Son to redeem the world. Jesus fulfilled the contract through his death, satisfying God’s demand for punishment of sin so that those who repent and place faith in His Son could be forgiven and reconciled to their Father in heaven.

In contrast to the old covenant (*ministry of the Law*), the new covenant is the *ministry of the Spirit* (2 Corinthians 3:8). On return to heaven, Jesus received the promised gift of the Holy Spirit from the Father (Acts 2:33) and baptizes those with faith in Him with the same empowering that anointed His ministry.

Jesus told disciples to stay in Jerusalem until given power by baptism in the Spirit (Luke 24: 49; Acts 1:5). Jesus didn’t begin ministry until He Himself was anointed with power, having come to earth after setting aside His heavenly glory (Matthew 3: 16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32, Philippians 2:7).

The Greek word describing the Spirit coming on Jesus following water baptism is *epi*, meaning to rest upon, fill or invade. It's a word used exclusively with baptism in the Holy Spirit. Only after the Spirit had come *epi* Jesus like a dove does Luke refers to Him as *full of the Holy Spirit* (Luke 4:1).

Returning to His hometown Nazareth, Jesus went to the synagogue where He read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Applying the words He Himself had written through the prophet, Jesus gives all the credit for His earthly ministry to the work of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:18,19,21).

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to pro-claim the year of the Lord's favor. Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

This anointing of Jesus with the power of the Holy Spirit is described elsewhere: "*You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him*" (Acts 10:37,38).

As a man, Jesus required this anointing with the Holy Spirit and power to carry out ministry. Some seem to think the only reason the Son of God came to earth was to pay a ransom price for sinners. But that's not the full message of the gospel.

Jesus appeared on *earth* “*to destroy the devil's work*” (1 John 3:8) and intends for disciples to continue that ministry in its fullness today. That requires us to be empowered with baptism in the Holy Spirit as was Jesus (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4,5).

On Resurrection eve, Jesus told the disciples, “*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you*” (John 20:21). Then Jesus breathed upon them and said the words, “*Receive the Holy Spirit*” (20:22).

On this Sunday, it was the resurrected Christ. Disciples received the inbreathed Holy Spirit and the result was spiritual life. They were born again and the Church had its birth.

On Pentecost Sunday it was ascended Christ. Disciples received the outpouring of the Spirit and the result was empowering. Now they could continue the ministry of Jesus by the same power of the Holy Spirit that had rested on Him.

We're to continue that ministry today: sharing the gospel, healing the sick, and setting free all those under demonic influence. And it's taking place around the world to the glory of Almighty God.

Many have lost sight of God's plan under the new covenant. They have somehow become deceived and believe anointing with power by the Holy Spirit doesn't exist for the Church today.

Outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was a work of God separate from regeneration and it takes place today. Teaching has confused many that what happened at Pentecost was *once-for-all-time* and that gifts like miraculous healing no longer operate.

During the days Jesus appeared to the disciples after resurrection, He spoke about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3) and Scripture suggests this kingdom is more than salvation. Paul says the kingdom isn't a matter of talk but of power (1 Corinthians 4:20).

When Jesus expelled the demon from a mute man, He was accused of driving out demons by Satan. Jesus answered that a kingdom divided against itself can't stand, and said, *"But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you"* (Luke 11:20).

Those in the kingdom not only live sober and godly lives. They preach with power, bringing many to repentance. In the name of Jesus, they heal the sick and set free those under demonic influence. It's truly a kingdom that exists in all fullness today.

Not all in the Church are part of this kingdom however. Jesus says the kingdom advances through

those forceful to lay hold of it (Matthew 11:12). One is required to do forceful violence to self-life, becoming a fool for Christ if necessary and resisting the ways of the world that hold one back from God

Only as we overcome the world and our flesh are we prepared to battle with demonic forces of evil in heavenly realms. As the apostle Paul says, we must be willing to suffer many hardships in order to enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).

The hardships and persecution suffered by all committed to the kingdom teach them to depend on God. When we lack power of the Spirit, it isn't that we aren't strong enough but because we aren't humble enough to let Jesus genuinely reign in our lives.

As long as we depend on our own experience, ability or education, we remain crippled. It's never by our might or power that God's work will succeed, but only by His Spirit (Zechariah 4:6). What was true of Jesus is most certainly true for us!

Jesus told the disciples, "*I give you authority to...overcome all the power of the enemy*" (Luke 10:19). But in order to exercise this authority, we must submit to heaven's authority and baptism in the Holy Spirit is critical for this to take place.

The Greek translated *kingdom* is **basileia** and means the place where a king rules. Those in the kingdom of God are those allowing Jesus to reign as

King. This involves denying of self, taking up crosses and giving control of one's life to the Holy Spirit.

This is why it's difficult for people successful in the world to enter this kingdom. They usually are decision makers who depend on their own knowledge and ability. Perhaps this is why Jesus chose ordinary, unschooled persons as His apostles (Acts 4:13).

We cannot expect Jesus to live **His** life in and through us until we're willing to lose **our** lives. It can be painful to destroy idols like striving to gain wealth and seeking the approval by others. While education isn't needed to enter the kingdom of God, humility is!

His kingdom causes alarm as it advances. The empire of Satan reacts as sick are healed and demons expelled. The world reacts against the witness of holy lives. Lukewarm believers are uncomfortable as well, so conflict can't be avoided in any direction.

Jesus' intends that all be part of this kingdom, but before resurrection comes death and before any crown comes a cross. There's no victory for any who seek to avoid suffering, making baptism in the Holy Spirit an essential ingredient for empowering.

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus said to the disciples, *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth"* (Acts 1:8). This being such a key verse, let's look briefly at two of the words.

The word power is translated from the Greek *dunamis*, the word from which dynamite is derived. Jesus is speaking of miraculous power. Disciples are told they'll have miraculous power needed to continue the ministry of Jesus (Luke 4:18-19; Acts 4:30; Acts 8:7).

The second word *witnesses* comes from the Greek *martus*. It might better express the meaning if *martus* were translated as *martyrs*. Lives of Christians are effective to the degree they die to self so that their witness is one of Christ-likeness.

There's a story of a young monk with trouble understanding what dying to self involved. So he went to ask his Superior.

The older man replied, "I want you to go to the grave of Brother James and say flattering things. Then come back to see me."

The young monk did as told and returned to see his Superior. "What did Brother James say about your praise and flattery?"

"Why he can't answer. He's dead."

A puzzled look came over his Superior. "Just one more thing. I want you to go back and accuse our late brother of terrible sins, even though false."

The next day, the young monk found himself again being asked, "Did Brother James have anything to say about your accusations?"

Again the answer was, "How can he speak? He's dead!"

The older man replied, “That’s what denying self is all about. When you’re no longer sensitive to flattery or rejection and personal ambitions are lost in service to Christ, you’ll have died to self.”

This tells a great deal as to need for baptism in the Holy Spirit. It’s a struggle to get off the throne in our hearts so that Jesus can reign. The disciples were forbidden to begin ministry until clothed with power for this reason. Jesus realized they’d try to witness in their own strength and fail miserably.

My wife and I recently went on a tour through Cape Canaveral. The rockets used for lift-off of space ships are huge. But payloads cannot function if not in the correct orbit. Booster rockets are needed to adjust the flight of space ships.

It caused me to think of my own life. It took a huge amount of grace for deliverance from a pit where I’d lived. I’m so grateful the Holy Spirit caused godly sorrow that opened my eyes to the need for repentance and forgiveness through Christ.

However I continued to stumble so badly after coming to Christ. Baptism in the Holy Spirit provided the boost that moved my life to a new spiritual level. It was then that dying to self really started. Before the baptism, my walk with Jesus had been so shallow as to make me tremble when I think about it.

I didn't appreciate the huge difference between being led by the Spirit and leaning on my own understanding. Looking back, baptism in the Spirit was not an option. If both Jesus and His disciples were able to do nothing until clothed with power by the Spirit, how desperately I needed baptism in the Spirit.

Teaching you get everything when saved is just like Sadducees in Jesus' day. After questioning Jesus, they were told, *"Are you not in error, because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God"* (Mark 12:24). Many are exactly like that today.

Those who fail to realize a need for Pentecost in their lives are in error and do not know Scripture or the power of God. But before we examine what the Holy Spirit comes to do, let's see how baptism in the Spirit is a distinct work of grace.

Certainly it was for the disciples. They were born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit on the eve of Jesus' resurrection (John 20:19-22). At Pentecost, fifty days later, it was empowering (not indwelling) by the Holy Spirit that took place (Acts 1:8).

Philip took the gospel to Samaria where the crowds saw miraculous signs (Acts 8). They listened to his words, believed the gospel, and were baptized in the name of Jesus (v.12). Later when the apostles in Jerusalem heard the Samaritans received Christ, they sent Peter and John to Samaria (v.14).

Upon arrival the two apostles prayed that the people might receive the Holy Spirit as the Spirit had not yet come upon (*epi*) any of them (vv.15,16). When Peter and John placed their hands on the people, they received the Holy Spirit (v.17).

When Scripture speaks of receiving the Holy Spirit after Pentecost, it always refers to the baptism in the Spirit. Indwelling by the Spirit is an automatic event at time of conversion. So here again, we see that baptism in the Spirit is separate from conversion.

Paul was converted on the way to Damascus. He fasted and prayed for three days before Jesus sent Ananias to place hands on him: *“Jesus who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 9:17).

Once again, baptism in the Spirit takes place after conversion. The one exception to delay between salvation and baptism in the Spirit is seen in the case of a Gentile centurion Cornelius. God had a specific purpose for immediate baptism in the Holy Spirit in this particular instance.

Many circumcised believers refused to accept that salvation was for the Gentiles. So in this instance, God used speaking in other tongues by these Gentiles to convince Jewish believers that salvation through Christ was also intended by God for non-circumcised Gentiles (Acts 10: 44-46).

Now we turn to what the Spirit comes to do? Years ago God told me in a dream to go to Honduras *where streams of living water would be poured out*. Jesus refers to this as meaning the Spirit (John 7:38,39), and the following day I called the senior pastor at our church.

To my amazement, he told me a missionary in Honduras just called to say he'd been told in a dream to go to St Petersburg for an unknown reason. I was asked if we would house him, and later he attended a prayer meeting in our home where he watched people receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

The next day, he told us dozens of pastors in Honduras were seeking baptism in the Holy Spirit. He invited me to teach about the baptism once arrangements had been made. While waiting to leave, I did something ever so foolish.

Like those who prepare sermons by studying what others write, I studied all I could find on baptism in the Holy Spirit and notes were stored on my new first computer. But shortly before leaving, I deleted all my notes accidentally and there was no backup!

I was horrified! Yet the initial shock turned to a surprising peace within minutes and I found myself prompted to pray for fresh insight. Revelation came a few days later on a Wednesday afternoon as I read the letter of Paul to the Philippians.

Excitedly I told my wife, “Sylvia, I just found a verse that explains exactly why baptism in the Spirit is so critical. It’s explained by two verses in Paul’s letter to the Philippians!” Then we left for midweek service after supper.

Following praise and worship the pastor said, “Please turn to the book of Philippians.”

I nudged my wife: “Watch it be chapter 3 and verses 10, 11 to confirm what God has revealed about teaching on the Holy Spirit.”

I held my breath for what seemed like eternity until the pastor continued: “Philippians 3, verses 10 and 11.”

I was overwhelmed by how God wanted the teaching done His way. My notes weren’t necessary. God was going to do the teaching His way.

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Philippians 3:10,11

Even now I feel my spirit stirred by how God reveals His will. I’d often read these verses, yet never seen correlation with baptism in the Holy Spirit. Then there is was! **The Holy Spirit comes to reveal Jesus to us, in us, and through us for the glory of God.**

“I want to know Christ.” The Holy Spirit has come to **reveal Jesus to us**. The Greek translated know doesn’t mean knowing about. We can know about, yet not know personally. The Greek here is the word ***ginosko*** and means knowing intimately. Jesus tells us this about the Holy Spirit.

“When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will bring glory to me by taking what is mine and making it known to you.” John 16:13,14

The Holy Spirit teaches us to have attitudes like that of Jesus. Paul writes, *“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better”* (Ephesians 1:17).

The Holy Spirit reveals knowledge to the heart about Jesus being a servant to others instead of being served and obeying His Father even unto death. As we come to know Jesus intimately, we are challenged to the very core of our being.

“I want to know the power of his resurrection.” The Holy Spirit has come to **reveal Jesus in us**. He changes us by same power that resurrected Jesus from the dead. Without this power, we’re unable to put self-life to death, not to mention our misdeeds of the flesh that need crucifixion (Romans 8:13).

I struggled with self-control for years and had given up before surrendering to the work of the Spirit. I didn't realize that what I was seeking is never called the fruit of the flesh. What I desperately needed is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23).

The character of Jesus will never be formed in us through human effort. What is supernatural is only done supernaturally. We tend to strive in our strength instead of resting in God and I'm still having to learn to cooperate with the Spirit (Philippians 2:13).

Failure to become more like Jesus is never due to not trying hard enough. It's refusing surrendering to the Holy Spirit and crucifixion of flesh. That's the one and only way the presence of Christ can be manifest in our lives.

"I want to know the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings." After revealing Jesus ***to us*** and ***in us***, the Holy Spirit then comes to ***reveal Jesus through us***. Paul had learned what happens when the Spirit of God works through one's life to touch others.

He suffered greatly in being used by God. But the apostle rejoiced in the fellowship if suffering with Christ. He realized sharing in the suffering of Christ meant he'd also share in the glory and that sustained him during times of severe trial (Romans 8:17).

When the Spirit guides our lives, we become a lovely aroma to those being saved, but a stench to

those who are perishing (2 Corinthians 2:15). The latter realize we reject their values and way of life. For this reason, Jesus warns that the world (including family members at times) will hate those who follow Him.

When Paul speaks of becoming like Christ in His death, he refers to crucifixion of self so that Jesus can live within. It's an exchange, giving up the old life for the new, forgetting what's behind while straining toward what is ahead.

This doesn't just mean forgetting unpleasant things. We're never to rest on victories of yesterday. Complacency is often the first step down the slippery slope of backsliding. Those mature in Christ will take such a view of things.

Two other purposes for baptism in the Holy Spirit are worthy of note. One involves prayer, and it concerns praying in accord with God's will. We don't always know how to pray but the Spirit does know as we read in Romans 8:26,27:

The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

Praying in the Spirit is a spiritual weapon with great power and Paul urges we do so on all occasions (Ephesians 6:18). And a final need for baptism in the Holy Spirit is to manifest spiritual gifts that come only by the empowering gained.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

1 Corinthians 12:7-11

Evidence of being baptized in the Holy Spirit is the manifesting of spiritual gifts. In Greek these are called ***pneumatica***, and differ from those gifts known as ***charismatica*** or grace gifts such as contributing to the needs of others, teaching and leadership.

While grace gifts are also God-given to build up the Church, spiritual gifts are different in that they

manifest supernatural power. Spiritual gifts should likewise not be confused with the fruit of the Spirit which relates more directly to Christian character and sanctification (Galatians 5:22-23).

The early Church asked God for the grace “*to speak your word with great boldness*” and “*heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders*” (Acts 4:29,30). God answered such prayers then and still does today. Experience around the world confirms that spiritual gifts are active in the Church today.

Denominations that fail to recognize the whole message of the gospel are diminishing in significance. Pentecostalism accounts for more than 90% of Church growth worldwide. The power of the Spirit is essential to spiritual health not only for individuals but for the corporate Church as a whole.

How is baptism with the Holy Spirit received? Here teaching can be misleading. One hears invitation to come forward for prayer without mention of being prepared. The importance of the heart being prepared is clearly seen in the following story.

The noted evangelist Dwight L. Moody first began holding services in a rented hall while working as a shoe salesman. He describes two ladies who came up after services to say, “We are praying for you.”

Finally Moody asked, “Why are you praying for me? Why don’t you pray for the unsaved?”

They replied, “We are praying that you may get the power?”

Moody didn’t understand what they meant, so he asked “Tell me what you mean by the power.” The ladies explained about baptism in the Holy Spirit and Moody’s heart was stirred.

He began to pray daily, humbly asking God to “*prepare my heart and baptize me in the Holy Spirit.*” Moody doesn’t explain what heart issues may have needed change but praying continued for six months without receiving the baptism.

Then he describes walking down the street in New York City when the power of God fell on him in a mighty way. He returned to the room where he was staying and the Holy Spirit filled him with incredible joy. Hours later, Moody writes that he begged God to withhold His hand, lest he die on the spot from joy.

His ministry suddenly had a new dimension. Signs, wonders and miracles followed and thousands were saved by anointed preaching. Moody later wrote that his message never changed but impact on hearers was dramatically different after the baptism.

In praying with many for baptism over years, I’ve repeatedly witnessed what Moody experienced. ***The heart must be prepared.*** God does not baptize a person filled with self-confidence, self-centeredness, or self-indulgence, let alone those given to addiction.

Today, perhaps more than ever, many obstacles inhibit receiving the baptism. These often fit into three categories described by the apostle John:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world.

1 John 2:15,16

The first of these roadblocks is the **cravings of sinful man** (*lust of flesh* in the King James Version). These are impure desires and gratifying the appetites of flesh the wrong way. I've yet to see anyone bound by addiction, greed or immorality receive the baptism; and immorality isn't confined to acts outside marriage.

The Greek word translated sexual immorality is a word **porneia** from which we get pornography. It includes feasting eyes on anything impure including sex-laced movies, seemingly ever-present soap operas, and racy novels.

A second obstacle is **lust of the eyes** for things attractive to the human eye but not to God. Jesus has warned that life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. The rich young ruler was law-abiding but chose to store treasures on earth instead of in heaven

(Luke 18:18-25). Greed for materialism hinders not only baptism in the Spirit but salvation as well.

This doesn't mean everyone must sell all they own and give to the poor. But we must be willing to put aside all that hinders serving God. Jesus warns that trying to serve two masters at the same time is impossible without loving one and hating the other. And God looks into the heart; He's never fooled!

A third obstacle is pride in **boasting of what one has and does**. Pride will insist on understanding instead of trusting. Wanting to analyze paralyzes the work of the Spirit. It causes us to make decisions that are independent of God – a common failing.

Because of pride, many fear giving up control of their lives. Yet that's what filling with the Spirit is about. It's giving the Holy Spirit permission to take us down the road of life as He chooses, something so foreign to the wisdom of man.

Likewise, one cannot be a people pleaser and filled with the Spirit. Paul says, *"If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ"* (Galatians 1:10). Co-dependency greatly hinders baptism in the Spirit with the idolatry of putting others before God when making decisions.

Unforgiveness is perhaps the most common obstacle we encounter in praying with people for the baptism. It's impossible to walk in step with the Holy

Spirit while bound by a root of bitterness. And a final obstacle is having the wrong motive (Acts 8:13-21). I've never seen a person receive the baptism whose goal was desire for a gift such as healing or tongues.

The only valid motive is to know Jesus better, become more like him and then follow him no matter what the cost. Jesus is aware of those who only seek gifts instead of seeking the Giver of gifts.

Romans 6:13 says, *"Offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness."* First offer yourself to God.

Next yield the parts of your body to be used as instruments of righteousness. It seems that a part God especially desires to control is the tongue, that part so unruly that no man can tame it (James 3:8).

The tongue is the part of the body chosen by God for evidence of baptism in the Spirit. Indeed the yielding of the tongue to control by the Spirit is the only sign mentioned in Scripture as valid evidence of baptism (Acts 11:15-17). But does this mean everyone must speak in tongues to be baptized in the Spirit?

God is sovereign and one can't insist that no one is baptized apart from the evidence of tongues. But one does expect all baptized in the Spirit to have their lives impacted in such a profound way as to be readily evident to others.

Furthermore, those baptized should manifest spiritual gifts described by Paul. Scripture says the Spirit gives gifts to each person as He decides, so to insist on being baptized in the absence of gifts seems contrary to what the apostle writes (1 Corinthians 12:11).

Some argue that fruit of the Spirit is evidence of being baptized. But no one waited to see if love, joy, peace or patience might develop. There was an immediate evidence of baptism and that evidence was speaking in other tongues as the Spirit enabled.

When and how does the baptism take place? The answer isn't in a box! It can be during worship or prayer, or with laying on of hands by someone gifted by God for this purpose. It can take place driving or walking down a street as with Moody.

Most important is a prepared heart (Acts 8:21). The greatest requirement is poverty of spirit. We're to hunger for righteousness, giving the Spirit control of our lives. God gives the Spirit to those who obey him, so we can't be in known rebellion (Acts 5:32).

A story is told about men sailing from Africa to South America. Nearing the end of the trip, they ran out of water and were becoming dehydrated. It's a clear type of the lukewarm Church in America.

Some sailors began to collapse from profound weakness. Yet they realized to drink salt water would only make matters worse.

Suddenly a ship came in their direction from the West and they called out in desperation, “Can you spare some water?”

The answer came back, “Throw buckets over the side. You’re in the river.”

Without realizing it, they’d entered the mouth of the Amazon but were failing to take advantage of their position.

That’s how it is for many believers. They’re not taking advantage of being in a river of grace that is so abundant. Nothing is needed more in the Church today as much as empowering by the Holy Spirit.

The Church urgently needs power to witness in a world so influenced by secular humanism and a host of false religions like Mormonism, Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism, not to mention materialism.

By Jesus’ own words, we cannot be the kind of witnesses He desires without power from on high (Acts 1:8). The early Church successfully combated a pagan society in which it existed only through this empowering by the Spirit. God doesn’t expect us to live victoriously in our strength.

We can never operate supernaturally without divine power, and yet confidence in the flesh has left the Church in a weakened condition. There is endless talk about grace, but it’s long overdue for the Church to renew its focus on the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

For indeed, He is the One who is called *the Spirit of grace* (Hebrews 10:29).

Finally we come to a **fourth baptism** that is rarely discussed...*a baptism of fire*. In two gospels, John the Baptist speaks of Jesus being baptizer *with the Holy Spirit and with fire*. It suggests baptism with fire may be related to baptism with the Spirit.

This is true! But before we come to that, let's look at the word *fire*. A word study of the Scriptures reveals three situations regarding fire. The first has to do with *offerings made to the Lord by fire*, a phrase used some seventy times in the Old Testament.

God specified sacrifices that were acceptable under the Law and demanded the best. In most cases, sacrifices were totally consumed by fire. Under a new covenant, God desires offering of ourselves as *living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God*. That's to be our spiritual act of worship (Romans 12:1).

A second situation is fire as a tool of refining. God refines us in a *furnace of affliction* (Isaiah 48:10) for the purpose of molding us into Christ-likeness. Every believer is well acquainted with this refining with fire.

God disciplines all those He accepts as being legitimate sons and daughters. This is done so that a harvest of righteousness and peace might be produced in our lives (Hebrews 12:7-11).

A third situation involves the *fire of judgment*. Fire came from the presence of the LORD to consume Aaron's sons who offered unauthorized incense. Fire consumed part of the camp when Israel complained of hardship. Fire devoured 250 men foolish enough to follow Korah in his rebellion against Moses.

Jesus says *"Everyone will be salted with fire"* (Mark 9:49) and the meaning of this is clear. Those who refuse to repent and place faith in Christ will be salted forever with fire in a place reserved for Satan and his angels. However, even those saved are salted with fire but under different circumstances.

The salting of those in Christ is the suffering experienced through acts of rejection and persecution as well as that of putting our fleshly desires to death. There can be division and opposition with members of one's own household, and so a baptism of fire can be extremely painful.

However this baptism of fire is guaranteed all believers: *"Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"* (2 Timothy 3:12). And one story about the disciples speaks pointedly to this in Mark 10:35-40.

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

"What do you want me to do for you, he

asked. They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink of or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

"We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

As crucifixion draws closer, Jesus refers again to this baptism: *"I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed"* (Luke 12: 50). In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asks His Father, *"If you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done"* (Luke 22:42).

Here is one example in Jesus' life where His will is different than that of His Father. There was a baptism of fire to endure, a cup of suffering before His earthly work would be complete. It wasn't exactly something Jesus was eager to undergo.

Even though Jesus knew it was His destiny to suffer and die so that God's demand for punishment of sin might be satisfied, He still had to submit His will to that of His Father. And as Jesus' brothers and sisters, the same is demanded of us (Luke 12:48).

In this passage, James and John are told they'd be baptized with the same baptism and drink the same cup as Jesus. As Paul writes, *"It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him but also to suffer for him"* (Philippians 1:29).

Nonetheless, Jesus has encouraging words for all who suffer and the early believers rejoiced when counted worthy to suffer for Christ (Acts 5:41). Faithful in persecution, some were crucified while others were burned at the stake or thrown to hungry beasts.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven."

Matthew 5:10-12

Many have similar experiences today in Hindu and Islamic nations where commitment to Christ leads to execution. But do not be deceived by cheap grace. Baptism with fire awaits every person who sincerely follows Jesus although this may be the last thing most professing believers in America wish to hear.

It certainly isn't taught where a soft gospel is preached and most listeners have lukewarm relationships with Jesus at best. The apostasy of which the Bible warns is taking place today. Many are

turning from faith as their love for Christ grows cold (Matthew 24:10-12; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3: 1-5; Revelation 2,3).

Only after my baptism in the Spirit did I really encounter a baptism of fire. I was basically invited to leave a church I attended for years. When I prayed for patients and healing took place without treatment, my medical practice suffered greatly.

Referrals slowed, especially from doctors who professed to be Christians. I was told they'd not refer patients unless the praying stopped, but there was no way to oblige short of not breathing. And the personal cost involved family as well.

I was such a hypocrite in earlier years, despite attending church. My children were not raised in the fear and love of the Lord, so they view me as extreme in my beliefs. I understand their feelings, but remain confident God will answer my persevering prayers.

Sadly most churches teach a new gospel with regard to these three baptisms. Infant baptism makes a mockery of a sacrament meant for those who make a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. And even if immersion is done, emphasis on the basic conditions of repentance and faith is often ignored.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit is emphasized in few American churches. The mistaken idea "You get everything when saved" has misled multitudes. And teaching that spiritual gifts ended 2000 years ago has

left much of the Church ignoring the full message of the gospel. Those without power who claim the sick can't be healed are dead wrong if not spiritually dead.

As far as a baptism of fire is concerned, people *“gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear”* (2 Timothy 4:3). The last thing most in the Church want to hear about is hardships, persecution and trials that make up fire needed to purify and mature our faith.

The gospel often preached is no gospel at all. Many lack boldness to demand repentance. They offer a gospel ignoring the need to exchange lives by dying to self so Christ can live within. Salvation is described as a one-time event rather than a lifestyle that must endure to the end.

Cheap grace is epidemic and never opens the door to salvation. It deceives the unsuspecting, and many never gain victory over their besetting sins. The cost of discipleship is sanitized by ignoring the way of the cross despite beautiful crosses that adorn so many sanctuaries.

We've forgotten that Jesus doesn't call us to salvation. His call is, *“Come, follow me!”* If we obey, three baptisms are waiting: in water, Spirit, and fire. And it's in the fire that we recognize Jesus as treasure for which a man will sell all he has to own.

Chapter Four:

**LAYING ON
OF HANDS**

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At first glance, the laying on of hands might seem quite unimportant compared to the doctrines of repentance, faith in God and baptisms. But since God includes the laying on of hands with these teachings, we can assume it is significant from the standpoint of heaven.

In fact, laying on of hands was practiced early in the history of God's chosen people. Joseph brought his sons to be blessed by Jacob in this way, suggesting that it already had become an accepted practice. And Moses passed on the leadership of Israel to Joshua through the laying on of hands.

Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole assembly. Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, as the Lord instructed through Moses."

Numbers 27:22,23

Laying on hands recognized a leader God had appointed. This continues to play a role in the Church in our day. In fact, the more I've studied this subject, the more it appears laying on of hands is of far greater importance than we sometimes accord it.

Laying hands on another person is so common in daily life that we've become casual in doing so for spiritual purposes. Such is neither wise nor really in line with Scripture. Like each of the other elementary teachings about Christ, laying on of hands warrants a sober approach.

We'll look briefly at four ways in which laying on of hands was used in the early church. These are to commission someone for a special work or position, to impart a spiritual gift, to impart a spiritual blessing, and for baptism in the Holy Spirit. Then we'll examine laying on of hands for healing in greater detail.

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. Acts 13:1-3

In setting apart Barnabas and Saul for specific work, we find laying on hands associated with prayer. Prayer is used with the laying on of hands for every purpose. It reminds us that only God can bestow grace on people, not those who are ministering in His name to others.

Commissioning Paul and Barnabas was also associated with fasting. When a prophetic word came to send them, the prophets and teachers were fasting as well. Jesus fasted to prepare for His own ministry and spoke of fasting as a spiritual discipline for those who would follow Him (Matthew 6:16-18).

When Paul and Barnabas returned to churches they'd established to appoint elders, it was done with prayer *and fasting* (Acts 14:23). Yet I've never known this practice followed in appointing of elders, even at churches claiming to be scriptural in their practices. In truth, fasting is virtually ignored today.

Over the years, I've watched people sent into missions and return in despair. At times, the reasons were apparent. Nearly any volunteer is accepted for many tasks. Yet even for distributing food, the early Church chose only men known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom when commissioning was done through laying on of hands (Acts 6:3).

We send men not even grounded in Scripture across the ocean on missions and do not insist on the baptism in the Holy Spirit as did Jesus before He allowed disciples to leave Jerusalem. And regarding prayer *with fasting* before laying on of hands, it must be a rarity in virtually any denomination.

Without meaning to be legalistic, it should not surprise us when service to the Lord lacks the divine anointing it might have had if only biblical

patterns were followed. I've had to learn this so many times in my personal experience.

The Church would do well to re-examine what was done at Antioch and consider prayer **with fasting** before appointing people to service. Few disciplines help us to reduce confidence in the flesh like a serious fast combined with prayer and meditation.

Scripture also tells us how prophecy came to guide important decisions at times. In my own life, remarkable instances of hearing God's voice and then seeing His power manifest have often been during or immediately after times of fasting.

A **second purpose** for the laying on of hands is for baptism in the Holy Spirit. Baptism can clearly take place without the laying on of hands since Christ is the Baptizer. Nonetheless we find laying on hands used in three of four cases where baptism is described in Acts following Pentecost. We also notice that not everyone seemed authorized by the Church to lay on hands for this purpose.

A **third purpose** for the laying on of hands is only described once in Scripture. Elders laid hands on Timothy and a spiritual gift revealed by prophecy was made active. Paul encourages young Timothy in this regard: *"Do not neglect your gift which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you"* (1 Timothy 4:14).

Paul makes another point in this letter: *“Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure”* (1 Timothy 5:22). This makes it clear that laying on of hands is far more than ceremonial.

If the purpose is to produce a spiritual effect, then spiritual contact as well as physical contact takes place. And in this contact, a possibility of harm exists should the spirit of either person be defiled by evil or unconfessed sin.

Paul emphasizes this by three separate warnings: *“Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands,” “do not share in the sins of others,”* and *“keep your-self pure.”* The apostle is issuing a warning regarding spiritual danger that can exist with laying on of hands.

In America, the possibility of evil spirits being transferred from one person to another is generally unrecognized and rarely discussed. We tend to be very unaware of the spiritual danger that can exist through either physical or verbal contact.

Satan is wise enough to not allow evil spirits to obviously manifest in our midst. If a demonic spirit should visibly manifest in our churches, the dispelling of deception might be very rapid.

Satan prefers to keep us in the dark as to his activity. *“What I don’t know doesn’t hurt me!”* is the attitude the devil prefers. He wants us ignorant of the spiritual danger through physical contact.

How do we guard against danger with laying on of hands? The answer is simple. At the minimum, safeguards should include the following:

- 1) laying on hands is to be exercised in humility only by those free of besetting sin;
- 2) direction of the Holy Spirit should be sought as to with whom, when, and how to pray;
- 3) finally, one needs protection by having put on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18).

If safeguards are observed, danger to both one laying on hands and one on whom hands are placed is avoided. Safeguards may be especially important if praying for baptism in the Holy Spirit. The greater power involved, the greater may be the danger. Under all circumstances, however, one should avoid laying on hands with carelessness.

A **fourth purpose** for laying on hands is praying for blessing. This is mentioned but one time in the New Testament when Jesus placed hands on children brought to Him (Mark 10:16). However such was a very common practice in Old Testament times.

Certainly blessing is asked in commissioning people for service unto the Lord and when dedicating children as was done to Jesus Himself (Luke 2:22). And there is no biblical admonition whatsoever to not pray for blessing in this manner.

A **fifth purpose** for laying on of hands is for healing of physical illness. Many examples are found in Scripture, and Jesus says of those having faith in Him, *“They will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well”* (Mark 16:18).

While laying on hands for this purpose is done in many churches, few instances of healing are seen. People often ask, “Would you please pray for me?” More often they should really ask, “Please teach me the Word of God about healing!”

To start with, most people don’t believe they’ll be healed. They realize that God is sovereign but have never seen healing and may not believe God desires to heal them. Yet they’ll go to a doctor for medicine to take against what they think is God’s will.

Divine healing became a reality for me shortly after receiving baptism in the Holy Spirit in 1988. To see God heal with prayer alone had a profound effect on me: cancer, blindness, infections, addictions and a stroke, not to mention the raising of a dead man.

Then to have God place His protective hand on my own incurable cancer as well as a fatal immune disease left no doubt as to His supreme power. Psalm 103:19 says, *“the LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.”* How true that is and how wonderfully it applies to every person who surrenders to His lordship!

Psalm 103 has been precious to me for fifteen years since being diagnosed with cancer. When we're aware that God's kingdom rules, we realize how this true is often abused. God is even blamed for the work of the devil at times. But Psalm 103 tells us about full redemption through Christ.

*Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not **all his benefits** – who forgives **all your sins** and heals **all your dis-eases**; who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

Psalm 103:1-5 (emphasis mine)

I draw your attention to the word all. All his benefits. All your sins. All your diseases. The Hebrew word ***kol*** translated all means nothing left out. It's our responsibility to believe what God says and to rebuke any and all thoughts to the contrary.

Do we believe God will forgive all our sins? Of course! Every Bible-based evangelist preaches so! But do we question all diseases being healed? We do, even while Scripture speaks of a sovereign God who promises healing!

People say, "I know God is sovereign but He chooses to not heal at times." That's insulting to the

character of God. The devil comes to steal, kill and destroy and doubts about God's desire to heal simply confirm the deceitful lies of Satan.

Scripture not only tells that God rules over all. God is revealed by the Incarnation. Jesus is the perfect image and exact representation of God. His ministry on earth revealed to us our heavenly Father's heart when it comes to the healing of sickness.

Never did a sick person come to Jesus, or was brought for healing, without being healed. Yet Jesus didn't do many miracles in Nazareth because of their lack of faith (Matthew 13:58). So we need to understand that man has a role in regard to divine healing.

There are three principles of healing that I've come to call ***Lessons from the Farm***: (1) *breaking up unplowed ground*, (2) *killing weeds of doubt*, and (3) *planting the right seed once soil is prepared*.

Healing may certainly not occur for a reason known only to God at times. But more often, healing

power is absent because conditions do not allow seeds of healing to take root and yield a harvest. The first of these conditions is unplowed ground.

Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground, for it is time to seek the Lord.

Hosea 10:12

God wants us to reap the fruit of His unfailing love and bless us with *all* benefits listed in Psalm 103. But our breaking up unplowed ground is essential. We must seek the Lord by sowing righteousness, doing as is right in the eyes of God.

In 2 Kings 5, we're told about a Syrian general with leprosy, symbolic of sin. Soldiers of Naaman had captured an Israeli girl who knew of a prophet with the power to heal. So the general asks the permission of his king to go to Israel.

The king agrees and sends silver and gold with a letter of introduction to Israel's king. This humors me. Naaman doesn't need a king's help. He needs a touch from God. It's like our ignoring the healing paid for by the wounds of Jesus (1 Peter 2:24).

We get referrals from primary doctors and go to specialists with insurance cards and money for co-insurance. But we fail to ask for prayer by those with gifts of healing or by seeking elders for the prayer of faith after anointing with oil (James 5:14).

Naaman isn't helped by Israel's king and goes to see the prophet. But he's offended because Elisha fails to come out. The prophet sends his servant to tell the general to wash himself seven times in the Jordan.

Naaman leaves angry. He wanted the prophet to call on God, wave his hand and bring instant cure, just as we often expect God to work our way.

Eventually Naaman's servants convince him to obey the man of God and wash in the Jordan. It's my belief nothing took place with the first six dips. If we improved with each dip, we'd continue. I believe Naaman experienced healing on the last dip when he persevered in faith.

The key that opened a door for healing was to break up unplowed ground of pride. Only as Naaman submitted to the will of God did his leprosy disappear. Over the years, I've found five things in the soil of my own heart that needed breaking up at times.

I say this being fully aware that sickness isn't always caused by sin. But often something needs to be corrected. I've learned to ask God with every illness, "What do you want me to learn?" And something is usually brought to my attention.

1) *Unbelief needs plowing up.* This refers to unbelief that God can deal with difficult situations. Stress will affect the immune system and healing of wounds, yet it's so common for us to try manipulating the outcome in our trials instead of trusting God.

Rosa came to the Free Clinic after suffering a stroke that left paralysis on one side of her body and slurred speech. Her blood pressure was so high that we called at once for transportation to the hospital. As we waited, it was learned Rosa was upset over a son jailed after repeated encounters with the law.

I asked if she were a Christian and she replied, “O yes, I love the Lord.” A lovely smile brightened her face as she answered.

“But it doesn’t sound as if you trust God,” I replied. “You’re trying to fix what only God can fix in your son’s life.”

I’ll never forget her slurred reply. “I was just thinking that a few minutes ago.”

“Well Rosa, why don’t you ask God to forgive you for doubting. You do that and I’ll ask God to help with your stroke.”

She did so and then I asked God to heal Rosa and laid my hands on her. Every sign of her two-day old stroke instantly disappeared. And in a clear voice, she said, “I can move just fine now.”

Clinic nurses watched in amazement as Rosa left without the slightest trace of a limp. Once doubt had been dealt with, healing became manifest.

2) *Self-abuse needs plowing up.* In my mid-forties, I developed high blood pressure with an irregular heart beat. While tests failed to reveal need for surgery, the

symptoms continued until tobacco and alcohol abuse were overcome by the grace of God. I’ve seen many experience an early end to life through self-abuse.

The story of Jesus healing a cripple at the pool of Bethesda holds warning. Jesus later found him at the temple and said to him, “*See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you*”

(John 5:14). We can't expect God to heal if we insist on abusing ourselves or allow sin to continue.

3) *Self-centeredness needs plowing up*. James says we don't have at times because we don't ask, and when we do ask, it's with the wrong motive (James 4:2,3). I've known many to want healing to get back to some self-centered activity. The Bible tells us Peter's mother-in-law got up to serve Jesus after being healed (Matthew 8: 15). The point being made seems obvious!

4) Unconfessed sin needs plowing up. James 5:16 says confess sins to one another and pray for each other so we may be healed. It doesn't speak about forgiveness, but being healed, and few sins compare to the deadly poison of unforgiveness.

John arrived at my office with a skin cancer ulcerating much of his scalp. We attended the same church and as I shared that God was healing patients with prayer, I saw his faith was being stirred.

I asked, "Do you have faith to be healed if I pray for you and hold off with treatment?"

"Yes," he replied, so I laid hands on him as I prayed. John returned one week later, his scalp totally healed. His wife told how cancer began to melt right after leaving our office the previous week.

The story resumes several years later at a Bible study where I was teaching. John arrived with the

cancer having completely regrown. At once I sensed an underlying spiritual problem.

Pressed about what had happened, John told how only a few weeks earlier, someone at his church cast doubt on his healing by divine intervention and John had taken great offense.

“He had no right to say that! I’ll never forgive him for not believing!” he said bitterly. And within days, cancer began to regrow rapidly.

I urged John to shed his bitterness without any success. Forgiveness continued to elude him and John died shortly from complications of this cancer. So it was that this man sadly lost his healing.

I recall reminding John of words Jesus spoke and I’ve always had concern for his soul: *“If you do not forgive men their sins, your heavenly Father will not forgive your sins”* (Matthew 6:15).

5) *Failing to seek the Healer needs plowing up.* So often those who fall sick are falling short spiritually in one way or another (the opposite can be true as well where the deeply committed are severely tested, their faith being used as a witness to others).

Slackness is usually first evident with personal devotions where there’s little accountability. If our devotional life is neglected, the armor of God is never in place. Under such circumstances, Satan’s arrows of affliction can find a ready target.

Indeed, affliction may be permitted by God so that we'll repent and not shame His Name. It's naive for us to think that God will allow us to ignore Him without some form of discipline.

"See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another." Isaiah 48:10,11

Many types of unplowed ground can exist and hopefully these examples will stimulate your thinking when it comes to seeking God for a healing touch.

If only healing is sought and not the One who heals, the soil of the heart will never be prepared for the next step that involves **killing weeds of doubt**.

This second ***Lesson from the Farm*** concerns doubt as to whether God is willing and able to heal. In this regard, James says he who asks must believe and not doubt because he who doubts should not think he will receive anything from God (James 1:6,7).

After a farmer plants seed, he waits in faith for nature to grow his crop. He doesn't dig up the seeds every few days to see if they're growing. That would kill seeds, yet it's exactly what many people do!

"I was prayed for earlier today but I'm not any better. I guess I'm not going to be healed." And with

that, weeds of doubt start to grow and soon choke out every healing seed that was planted.

Most Christians call the doctor without giving one thought to divine healing. Yet Scripture says, *“Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well”* (James 5:14,15).

These instructions are seldom followed for a variety of reasons. Some hesitate to call because they rarely (if ever) see healing result from prayer. Healing may not have operated because those praying are lacking empowerment by the Spirit or those prayed for are lacking faith (James 5:15).

There can be failure to appreciate that healing isn't always immediate. Ten lepers in Luke's gospel were healed as they went to present themselves to the priests (Luke 17:14). In one case, it is recorded that Jesus prayed twice for a blind man before vision was fully restored, making it clear that persevering in prayer is required in some cases (Mark 8:22-25).

If healing is partial, one may either choose to persevere in faith or begin to doubt. But healing will be arrested once faith is no longer active. It's puzzling that anyone with partial healing would then go to the doctor instead of seeking more prayer and persevering in faith....but I've seen it happen quite often.

As mentioned, we should never doubt God's desire to heal those who are sick and to set free those oppressed by the devil. Scripture clearly reveals the desire of God our Father to see us healed, especially as seen in the earthly ministry of His Son.

At times, the reason for lack of healing is not having had seeds of healing planted which brings us to the third ***Lesson from the Farm***, that of **planting the right seed**. Here we turn to the prophet Isaiah for the full message of the gospel.

Isaiah 53 verse 1 asks, *"Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?"* Who believes all that Jesus has done for mankind through His suffering, death on a cross, and resurrection from the dead?

This brings us into conflict with false teaching that divine healing is no longer meant for our age and does not operate today. So let's see what God says in His Word as opposed to unbiblical doctrines that are so common among men.

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. Isaiah 53:4,5 (emphasis mine)

Many believe Jesus was pierced for our *transgressions*...for rebellion against divine authority. They believe Jesus was crushed for our *iniquities*...for sins. But they do not believe the full message.

The Hebrew word translated *infirmities* means diseases and sickness, and the word translated *healed* means a complete cure. Nonetheless, we don't always recognize the compassion of God for the sick.

When Moses brought Israel out of Egypt, the grace of God was such that no one was feeble or sick among two million liberated by the great redemptive event in the Old Testament. And we know Jesus never refused to heal anyone who came for healing.

At various times, Peter and Paul also healed every person who came for prayer. The seed needing to be planted isn't prayer, but the Word of God. Peter quotes Isaiah, saying Jesus bore our sins in His body on a tree and that we're healed by His wounds.

Jesus died not only for remission of sins, but so healing can take place. That's the Word of God and the Word of God is true (John 10:10). Yet it seems the great majority of those professing Christ are doubters when it comes to divine healing.

At times healing isn't seen for reasons known only to God. But as a general rule, God wants us to be healthy. Let's not be confused by those who say God may want to heal. God does want to heal! Scripture says so, and that settles it!

God's Word is also clear that sickness can be demonic in cause. Much of Jesus' ministry was given over to delivery of those with physical afflictions that were caused by evil spirits. But many are confused by poor teaching as to the reality of spiritual warfare.

Some would teach that demons can't attack a true believer. It's unfortunate to be ignorant of Satan's schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11). Greater awareness of the need to exercise authority Jesus places in the Church to deal with the demonic exists in the third world.

When illness is demonic, evil spirits must be expelled instead of praying for healing. During my ministry at the County Jail, an inmate for prayer for severe neck and arm pain that had persisted for years following an injury.

Exams showed a protruding disk pressing on nerves in his neck and his right arm had withered to become virtually useless. But as I reached out a hand to pray, the Holy Spirit directed me to expel an evil spirit. Instantly the pain was completely relieved.

Months later this man appeared at our church with his wife and I delightedly said to my wife, "This is the man I told you about with paralysis of his arm and severe pain that was relieved by the expelling of a demon spirit."

When he reached out to shake hands, his grip was crushing. He'd experienced complete recovery of

strength in an arm that had been useless. The lesson here is to not put healing in a box. At times God is wanting to have demon spirits expelled.

Deaf children are having hearing restored by the expelling of deaf and dumb spirits today. What a sharp contrast this is to the more traditional approach of ministering to the deaf as they continue living with their disability of deafness.

In these days of ever-increasing evil, the need for battle against Satan's empire is steadily mounting. Let us not forget that the One who is in us (the Holy Spirit) is far greater and more powerful than is our adversary the devil (1 John 4:4).

I've heard well-meaning evangelicals argue against binding the strong man and the expelling of demonic spirits. They say that because the archangel Michael did not contend with Satan and only said "*The Lord rebuke you!*" (Jude 9), we should not dare attempt to exercise authority over the devil either.

However, they overlook several biblical facts including, (1) a significant part of Jesus' ministry was expelling demonic spirits; (2) Jesus gave the disciples authority to overcome all the power of the devil (Luke 10:19); and (3) the disciples continued to exercise this authority on Jesus' return to heaven (see Acts).

Jesus placed a ministry of deliverance in the Church, but it's been neglected by evangelicals for a

long time. In these final days of the Church age, it's urgent for believers to act in all the authority given by heaven. Our struggle is clearly against spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms, lest we forget.

The full message of the gospel is not only of sins being forgiven but of deliverance and healing. It is our responsibility to break up unplowed ground, put to death weeds of doubt, and reach out in faith to touch the hem of Jesus' robe. By doing so, we bring glory to Him who is so worthy of both our honor and praise (John 14:12,13).

Chapter Five:

**RESURRECTION
OF THE DEAD**

CHAPTER FIVE:

Resurrection of the Dead

We've come to the final two teachings. God's demand for repentance and faith like that of Abraham have been reviewed along with baptisms that apply to life in Christ. And we've examined the different roles for the laying on of hands.

These teachings are related to the world and to time as we understand it. The final two teachings are different. Both resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment take place beyond this world and belong to eternity rather than time.

Eternity isn't endless time. It's a different kind of existence, a realm in which God has always dwelt. Moses wrote, *"Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God"* (Psalm 90:2).

Eternity is a part of God's nature that is from everlasting to everlasting. Not only is eternity a type of existence that belongs to God. It's also timeless in the usual sense of the word.

When Moses asked God by which name He wanted to be known, God told him to say, ***"I AM has sent me"*** (Exodus 3:14). This reveals the eternal nature of God. He is the past and present as well as the future in an eternal **"I AM."**

It's the same revelation given the disciple John as he penned the words of Jesus: *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, who is, and who was and who is to come, the Almighty"* (Revelation 1:8).

Alpha is the first letter in the Greek alphabet and Omega the last. It's God's way of saying He's the beginning and end of everything including time. All things have their origin in God, are sustained by God, and find their end in God.

So when we speak of eternity, it's not endless time. It's the realm in which God exists, the God who brought the world into existence *out of eternity*.

Time came to exist with creation of the world as we know it. The sun rises, sets and rises again; and we say one day or twenty four hours has passed.

By another act, God will bring this world to an end someday. Then time with meaning as it relates to this world will no longer exist.

We need not wait until the end of the world for eternity. Time will no longer exist the moment we take our last breath. And while there's a lot we don't know about the afterlife, Scripture does reveal a good deal about stepping from time into eternity.

That's what the final two teachings are about. Two appointments are waiting for us: resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. They take place in that order, just as earlier teachings were listed in order.

Resurrection simply means raising the human body and re-uniting it with the soul and spirit from which it separated at death. Both testaments teach of resurrection. *“Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt”* (Daniel 12:2).

Jesus says the same: *“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned”* (John 5:28,29).

One might ask why resurrection of the body is necessary. One reason is that Jesus was declared to be Son of God by His resurrection (Romans 1:4). The risen Christ justifies us before God: *“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification”* (Romans 4:25).

It isn't just confessing Jesus as Lord by which we're saved, but by believing He was resurrected from the dead as the One and Only Son of God.

If you confess with your mouth “Jesus is Lord” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9

We also need to recognize a three-fold nature of our being. At creation God said, *“Let us make man in our image, in our likeness”* (Genesis 2: 26). In Hebrew

this refers to the total personality of man, making a correlation between God and man unlike that for any animal contrary to ideas about evolution.

God exists as three distinct persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and man also has three parts. Many passages of Scripture attest to a triune division of the human personality, referring to spirit, soul and body either singly or in combinations.

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

Paul shows concern for the total person, and names three parts which make up our nature. And in Hebrews 4:12, we find the same three-fold division, the body referred to as joints and marrow: *“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow.”*

The Bible says human nature originates out of two sources. *“God formed the man from the dust of the ground (the body) and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (spirit), and man became a living being (the soul)”* (Genesis 2:7). The physical, visible part comes from earth, invisible parts from God.

At death, the invisible parts (spirit and soul) leave their earthly vessel while the visible part returns to its origin. *“The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it”* (Ecclesiastes 12:7). There are but two exceptions.

The Old Testament saints Enoch and Elijah were translated directly from earth to heaven without seeing death. The other exception will be those alive at Christ’s return for the church in what’s known as the ‘rapture.’

“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep (die), but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.” 1 Corinthians 15:51,52

Resurrection of the body is the hope to which we hold by faith. If the dead were not raised, we’d likely be saying, *“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die”* (1 Corinthians 15:32).

Some profess Jesus while living that way. The apostle Paul says their destiny is destruction as their stomach is their god in living for fleshly appetites.

Resurrection is necessary since the body is part of the human personality. God has decided man will appear before him in the body to answer for things done while in the flesh.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him, for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. 2 Corinthians 5:10

Final judgment doesn't take place until after resurrection of the body. The spirit and soul go to a place they occupy between death and resurrection, and are aware of their condition during this time.

The story of a poor beggar Lazarus who lay at the rich man's gate is told by Jesus as a true event. He died and was carried by angels to Abraham's side. But the rich man found himself in hell after death.

The latter called to Abraham , *"Have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger and cool my tongue"* (Luke 16:24). But Abraham replied, *"A great chasm has been fixed so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us"* (16:26).

Lazarus and the rich man were both in a place for departed spirits, but with different destinies. One was a place of torment called hell, the other a place of rest called Abraham's side. This name tells it's a place for those who follow steps of faith marked out by the father of those who believe in Christ (Romans 4:11).

Now since Jesus made atonement for sin, the way is open for the righteous to have instant access to the presence of God while waiting for resurrection

(2 Corinthians 5:6-8). As soon as a believer dies, the spirit is released from the body and immediately received into the presence of God (Acts 7:55-60).

Another question is what the resurrected body will be like. For the saved, transformed bodies will be like that of Christ (Philippians 3:21). They'll retain identity with this life and be recognizable just as the disciples recognized Moses and Elijah at Jesus' transfiguration. Yet glorified bodies will be quite different.

They'll be imperishable, free of weakness and sickness (1 Corinthians 15:42). At the same time Jesus says the faithful will eat and drink with him in heaven. We can recall that Jesus ate fish with the disciples while in His glorified body after resurrection (Luke 24:42,43).

Paul says the same power that raised Jesus' body will raise those who believe in Jesus (Romans 8:11). This brings us to when resurrection takes place. It's not simple to answer as there are several resurrections and the first has already taken place.

At Jesus' death, *"the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection, they went into the holy city and appear-ed to many"* (Matthew 27:52,53, Revised Standard Version).

Another resurrection occurs as Jesus comes for His bride. Those dead in Christ are raised first and

given new bodies. Living believers rise to meet Jesus in the clouds, their bodies transformed from earthly to glorified, from mortal to immortal (1 Corinthians 15:54).

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17

The word rapture isn't in the Bible. When the words caught up were translated from Greek to Latin, the word **raptu** was used. When the rapture will take place is subject to great debate. What is not debatable however is who will be raptured.

Many are at risk of being left behind, deceived by cheap grace. *"The Lord knows who are his," and "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness"* (2 Timothy 2:19). Multitudes confess Jesus but are failing to turn from wickedness. and will not be raptured.

A resurrection takes place when Jesus comes to reign on earth for a thousand years after seven years of tribulation. Saints martyred during the tribulation will come to life and reign with Jesus (Revelation 20:4).

Two witnesses who die in the tribulation are already resurrected and taken into heaven before the tribulation ends (11:11,12). One final resurrection takes place at the end of Jesus' thousand year reign when all who died apart from Christ since creation of the world are resurrected.

With that resurrection, three events remain to take place. The *New Jerusalem* comes down as a final dwelling place for all who placed their faith in Christ and endured in obedience (Matthew 7:21; Revelation 21:1,2).

Then the earth and heavens as we know them will be completely destroyed by fire (2 Peter 3: 10). After that comes eternal judgment, bringing us to the last of the elementary teachings about Christ.

Chapter Six:

**ETERNAL
JUDGMENT**

CHAPTER SIX:

Eternal Judgment

Hebrews speaks of *eternal* judgment because there are two judgments. One is carried out *in time* on earth, the other in eternity. The one called eternal is waiting for each person after time on earth is over. As Hebrews 9:27 says, “*man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.*”

Because this judgment is eternal, God wants all to repent so none might perish. There’s no chance after death to get things right, no purgatory for prayers to alter God’s judgment for those who failed to submit to truth as revealed in Christ. For without holiness, no one will see God (Hebrews 12:14).

Scripture is explicit that eternal judgment will be guided by four main principles that relate not only to each person’s **belief** but one’s **behavior**. Before we come to that, however, let’s look at the judgment that takes place during time on earth. There are a number of examples in the Bible.

God rained fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah because of wickedness. He brought swift judgment on Ananias and his wife Sapphira for their hypocrisy in trying to gain praise from the Church by lying about a gift (Acts 5:1-10).

God's judgment fell repeatedly on Israel after God warned, *"If you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands... then I will do this to you: I'll bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life"* (Leviticus 26:14,15).

Paul says what took place is written down as warnings so we don't set our hearts on evil as they did (1 Corinthians 10:6-11). God's judgments were intended to bring repentance. On the other hand, Satan would like to have us think that bad consequences don't exist when our deeds are evil..

It's difficult to imagine a greater lie other than denying the very existence of God. The question we need to answer is, "Where will our eternity be spent?" Scripture makes it abundantly clear only two options exist for each person born on earth.

One is a lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels; it is also a place of eternal judgment for all who refuse to place their faith in Christ. The other is in the presence of God who wants to bless us eternally more than we can imagine.

I find it fascinating what Scripture says about who will judge. The Old Testament views God as one who cannot tolerate sin and yet is merciful and long-suffering. When God had to carry out judgment on earth, Isaiah says it was an *"alien task"* (Isaiah 28:21).

It's not the natural desire of our heavenly Father to punish those He created. So God turned over eternal judgment to His Son.

John 5:22 tells us, *"The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father."* John 5:26,27 says, *"As the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man."*

These passages explain why the role of judge is transferred from the Father to His Son. With office of judge goes the honor due the judge, and God wants His Son to receive the honor due Him. Since Jesus is also Son of Man, He's aware of human weakness.

Because of His own experience, Jesus is able to allow for our failings within limits. But He is also loving and merciful like his Father. So He doesn't want to not be in the position of exercising judgment on those he came to save.

"As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day."

John 12:47,48

The bottom line? Jesus transfers authority to judge given by His Father to the Word of God. How we respond to God's Word will determine eternal fate. That's what we're told by Jesus in plain language.

So the **first principle** of judgment is that it'll be on the basis of truth, truth that is the Word of God (John 17:17). I find this particularly interesting since it's consistent with God's position about judgment under the Law in the old covenant.

Many are fond of saying that Christian life has nothing to do with 'do's' and 'don'ts.' There is some validity to that in the sense that what's most critical is an exchange of lives, crucifixion of self so that Christ might live within. But it is not biblical to downplay a demand of God for obedience to His Word.

In a practical everyday sense, all in the Church have been saved "*for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood*" (1 Peter 1:2). Yes, all of our unintentional disobedience is under Jesus' blood. But *obedience to Jesus Christ* is also foretold as expected by God under the new covenant.

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

Ezekiel 36:26,27

We've already seen that Abraham's faith was characterized by obedience. Jesus makes it clear only those who obey the will of God enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21). And there's but one way to learn God's will...the study of His Word (Matthew 4:4).

The acronym for BIBLE, Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth, refers to knowledge of truth for all who wish to not be ashamed as they stand before the Holy One they profess as their Lord and Savior at the time of eternal judgment.

Dusty Bibles must cause the Lord to grieve. His Word is meant to be a lamp to our feet and a light for our path (Psalm 119:105). It mocks Jesus, the Word made flesh, to ignore the guidelines for life that He has written for us.

The **second principle** of judgment is that it'll be according to each person's deeds on earth. This is in conflict with false apostles who preach a cheap grace, suggesting behavior isn't of concern as long as one has the right beliefs.

God will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. Romans 2:7,8

The **third principle** is that judgment will be according to our level of understanding. Those having knowledge of God's commands as revealed through His Word will be judged by higher standards than are those lacking such knowledge (James 3:1).

Jesus emphasizes this by saying it'll be more tolerable at eternal judgment for Sodom than for those cities where His teachings were rejected by those who heard what He said (Matthew 11:24).

The fourth principle is that judgment will be impartial (1 Peter 1:17). "*God does not show favoritism.*" Men are influenced by education, wealth, appearance and social position, but God doesn't see us that way. "*The LORD looks at the heart,*" is a principle that is mentioned a dozen times in Scripture.

Because of this principle, there are certain to be surprises at the time of eternal judgment. People unknown to the world will receive honor far beyond that given others who are famous. Jesus has already told us, "*Many who are first will be last, and the last first*" (Mark 10:31).

Before discussing stages of eternal judgment, let us examine the often quoted saying that Christians need not fear condemnation. It is certainly true that there's no condemnation for those in Christ according to the infallible Word of God. The important question is often ignored, namely, "*Who* is in Christ?

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Romans 8:1 (King James Version)

The answer to who is in *Christ Jesus* is found in verses 1-4 of Romans 8 in the various translations. Virtually all express a requirement that one must walk in ways of the Spirit and not after ways of the flesh to escape condemnation.

When people quote the verse of there being no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, the condition for this being true is almost always ignored....the same cheap grace as when demand to repent for salvation is not emphasized.

The promise of no condemnation is only for those whose minds and actions are controlled by the Holy Spirit. This is consistent with Paul saying there is no inheritance in Christ for those continuing to live by acts of the sinful nature.

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you as I did before that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:19-21

The Galatians were reluctant to accept Paul's warning – just as many are today – and the apostle had to repeat himself. The early apostles recognized false prophets had entered the Church and branded them as “*godless men who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality*” (Jude 4).

Any idea one can deliberately live according to the flesh and not be condemned is pure heresy. God warns that a righteous man must never think himself secure if rebelling against God.

If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits sin and does the same detestable things the wicked man does, will he live? None of the righteous things he has done will be remembered. Because of the unfaithfulness he is guilty of and because of the sins he has committed, he will die. Ezekiel 18:24

We must not be deceived by those who claim behavior doesn't matter as long as beliefs are correct. There'll be no court of appeals for verdicts at eternal judgment. Verdicts will be just and final, and warning is given with good reason to work out salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12).

In considering what Scripture says about the stages of eternal judgment, we start with Peter saying that judgment begins with the church (1 Peter 4:17). He

says since it's hard for righteous persons to be saved, what will the outcome be for those who fail to obey the teachings of Christ.

Not only do we see demand for obedience, but it's made clear those saved will suffer and must keep doing good in spite of suffering (4:19). Peter is saying all faithful believers can expect trials as they follow in the footsteps of Christ.

The reason the judgment seat of Christ will not hold condemnation for faithful Christians is that an ***important event leads up to that judgment***. Chaff will already have been separated from wheat before the faithful come to the judgment seat of Christ.

Psalms 1 says the wicked “*are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous*” (vv.4,5). Jesus tells us the same thing in parables, one describing a mixture of hypocrites and faithful in the Church being like fish caught in a net.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous.” Matthew 10:47-49

There'll be a separation prior to the judgment seat of Christ. Again in the parable about ten virgins (Matthew 25), all once had oil in their lamps, signifying presence of the Holy Spirit. All are also aware that the bridegroom (Jesus) is returning.

But His return to rapture the Church comes at an unexpected time. All are asleep and only five have lamps full of oil. The other five failed to persevere in faith and their lamps are going out, having lost their first love and becoming lukewarm (Revelation 2:4,5).

I preached a series of revivals in Honduras in 1992 using this parable. I should note that nothing was billed as revival because such only occurs if the Holy Spirit sovereignly moves to bring deep repentance and re-commitment by those who are lukewarm.

When I came to where foolish virgins were not allowed entry to the heavenly banquet, the Holy Spirit had me cry, **“Let me in! But Jesus said, ‘Go away! I don’t know you’”** (Matthew 25:11,12). And each night, repentance erupted at this point.

People fell to the floor, weeping in repentance, asking God to forgive their sins. God confirmed the preaching of truth with miraculous healings and it was later reported that lasting fruit resulted in each and every town where we ministered.

The unfaithful will not be welcome in heaven, despite once having had the Holy Spirit in their lives.

They may recall Jesus' words at judgment: "*You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled by men*" (Matthew 5:13).

Those who fail to understand such parables are deceived. Jesus warns a significant part of the Church will not be ready, their love having grown cold. The parables such as that about ten virgins are warning us that only those who stand firm to the end will be saved (Matthew 24:12,13).

Lack of bold teaching about the real danger of apostasy...about falling away from faith...is shocking. Many in the pulpit will not find themselves innocent because they have compromised the gospel handed down to the Church by the apostles.

Even for those who are faithful, the judgment seat of Christ will be a solemn experience. Secret acts and failure to show love in light of opportunities will be revealed. There'll be the loss of rewards as well as gain at that time.

There will be no judgment of righteousness however. The righteousness required of believers will not be that of the faithful, but that of Christ.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21

The degree to which the will of God has been obeyed will determine rewards. The parable of the ten minas illustrates this in Luke 19. Each servant had an equal opportunity to earn more for his master and the one who earned the most received the greatest reward.

In short, eternal rewards will depend upon our faithfulness in using our time, talents and treasures in service of the Lord. In the same way, any failing to be obedient will result in the loss of rewards that might have been granted by God.

A second stage of judgment is at the end of the tribulation when all Gentile nations appear before the throne of Christ's glory as described in the parable of sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-46). There are no Jews at this judgment. They'll have passed through great trial and survivors will be reconciled to God through Jesus.

There'll not be judgment for the faithful at this time either. The obedient will have been received into the millennial kingdom (Matthew 25:34). Those failing to show obedience by reaching out in love to the least of men are sent into the fire of hell prepared for the devil and his angels (25:41-46).

One final judgment takes place following the thousand year reign of Christ. All remaining dead are resurrected and brought before the great white throne judgment (Revelation 20). All without names written in the Book of Life will be cast into the lake of fire.

Because judgment is eternal, Jesus tells us to cut off our hand or pluck out an eye if either causes us to sin. *“It’s better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched”* (Mark 9:48).

Judgment is so terrible that we must separate from anything that leads us to sin. But many today are like the Israelites of old. They couldn’t stand having sin exposed and wanted comforting messages instead of ones that were confronting. Scripture says this is an attitude that will prevail again in the last days.

“Give us no more visions of what is right. Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions. Stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel.”

Isaiah 30:11

There are things we don’t understand about the judgment, and there’s no profit in speculating about what is a mystery. On the other hand, what Solomon has called the conclusion of the matter is certain to be profitable if we’ll apply it to our daily lives:

Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

Ecclesiastes 12:13,14

Epilogue

All too often the Church is a form of godliness while denying its power. Frequently absent are signs, wonders and miraculous healings together with the explosive evangelism seen in many less industrialized nations of the world.

God's offer of salvation has been castrated by the preaching of pardon based on faith alone with no demand for repentance. The idea that God is forgiving of sins for anyone who refuses to give up wickedness is totally contrary to Scripture.

Multitudes are deceived into believing they are saved because they follow someone in saying a prayer. They proceed to talk as though Jesus were personal to them while continuing to live as though He does not really exist.

This is because a divided Christ is taught in a new gospel promoted by many. It's a heresy that Jesus can be received as Savior without being required to yield to His lordship. But the Bible makes no division in the offices of Jesus.

Unless received as Lord and Master, He will never be one's Savior. Yet if a demand for obedience is stressed, a cry of "Works!" is commonly raised. To avoid the error of salvation by works, salvation with no need for obedience has been adopted.

In the beginning, God made man in His own image. God is Spirit and gave man a spirit in order to mingle His life with man's in blessed fellowship. But the Fall deadened the spirit of man.

With the Fall man lost his ability to fellowship with God and bear His image. Restoration of his spirit became necessary for man to once again become what he was created to be.

The only way for this to happen is to be *born again* through Jesus who possesses the life we need in Himself (John 5:26). It's divine life and one that only comes to us through the Spirit of Christ.

However, what Paul calls the *ministry of the Spirit* is sorely lacking today. As a result, the visible Church is barely distinguishable from the pagan world in terms of sexual immorality, divorce, addiction, and greed, not to mention depression and even suicide.

Many claim salvation *from* past sins but aren't saved *to* righteousness. Old things have not genuinely passed away. These professing Christians do not have a new life, new interests, real hope for eternity or even desire to serve the One they call Savior.

A new gospel makes no demand whatsoever for crucifixion of self which is why so many still live in defeat. Yet apart from dying with Christ, there is no way to put the old man to death and live in victory.

The idea of counting suffering for Christ as a privilege is dismissed. Cheap grace shuns the idea, but Jesus urges us to buy gold refined in the fire to be rich and only in the refining fire of trials do we ever learn dependence on God and obtain this gold.

Even after laying a foundation based on these elementary teachings about Christ, our spiritual life is incomplete. Newborn babies can be born under ideal conditions and be perfectly healthy when leaving the womb. But without nourishment, they soon die.

This is true spiritually. Many live on diets that lack the spiritual food of God's Word. Seeds planted in the ground need water and light. The Bible refers to the water of God's Word and says the unfolding of the Word gives light (Ephesians 5:26; Psalm 119:130).

Maturing in Christ is a work of both God and the believer. Only by the Spirit can we put to death the misdeeds of flesh and perfect holiness in reverence for God (Romans 8:13). But it remains our responsibility to learn what God prohibits as well as promises.

We cannot afford to be ignorant of Scripture. God warns us, *"My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you"* (Hosea 4:6). Let us not fail to take heed of what God is saying.

Tools used to mold us into the image of Jesus are threefold. One is the Word of God and the second is the power of the Holy Spirit. Many try to mature only by the Word and fail by not depending on the enlightening and empowering of the Holy Spirit.

Trials are the third tool. It would be nice to have fruit bloom in our lives without trials but it's not realistic. This is why we're to consider trials as joy and why Paul tells us hardships are necessary to enter the kingdom of God.

We have a challenge. Are we going to build on these elementary teachings and move on to maturity, or remain as we are? Doing nothing is a choice but the wrong one, especially if we lack an exciting and life-changing relationship with Jesus.

Some of us are in desperate need of a change. We haven't even been taught what God calls highest priority. It's time for us to leave those denominations that have abandoned biblical truth and do what God says in referring to the apostate Church:

"Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues."

Revelation 18:4

Find yourself a body of believers that is truly hungry for commitment to God instead of comfortable religion. Replace a lukewarm relationship with Jesus with sincere intimacy that comes by learning what the apostle meant in saying, *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”*

Jesus showed us the gap between divine life and human life and combined the two during His time on earth. Now He calls us to inherit the very same life by the indwelling and empowering of His Spirit.

What the apostle calls the *ministry of the Spirit* has a desperate need for understanding by the Church. It's at the core of what is explained in these teachings about Christ...*being filled with the Spirit*.

Help us, O Lord, to see our bodies as the very habitation of Your Holy Spirit and to keep ourselves as the pure and holy temples where You dwell.

May Your kingdom exist in its fullness in us and through us so that Your Name might be glorified on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

God has not changed, nor has His Word. But teaching of Scripture has changed and, as a result, the exciting Church of the first century is all but impossible to find today in the United States or highly industrialized countries of Europe.

A form of godliness has emerged which denies power to radically save the vilest sinner, raise the dead, restore sight to the blind, heal the sick or expel demons in the name of Jesus. Yet all such things are taking place elsewhere in the world and there is no mystery as to the reason for the difference.

The challenge is to again begin teaching what God calls elementary teachings of Christ as outlined in Hebrews 6:1,2. The gospel being preached in many places has been misleading for decades. We're asked to examine ourselves by Paul, and the reader is encouraged to do so after reading this book: *"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith: test yourselves"* (2 Corinthians 13:5).