

Roland J. Ledoux

WALKING



*Exhortations on a
Christian's Walk with the Lord*

Walking In Christ

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ROLAND J. LEDOUX

OASIS BIBLE MINISTRY

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With Deepest Appreciation

My wife Sue, has been my biggest supporter and help. She has graciously allowed me many hours of private time to not only put this together, but to also pray for the guidance necessary to let it all come together. She truly is the love of my life and God's greatest gift to me!

My brother-in-law, Rev. Ron Torres, who led me to the Lord oh so many years ago and who has remained a constant source of inspiration.

Mom Torres, for her continued prayer in my life and never willing to give up on me. Along with the continued intercession for me, her walk with our Lord and Savior has been a light in an otherwise dark world.

Pastor Rick Leis, who when I thought I could never be used of the Lord, taught me that with God, all things truly are possible. Several years ago he gave me one word that I have never forgotten, integrity. Thank you always, Rick.

And not the least of all is my Master, my Lord and Redeemer. There are no words that can express the love I have for You or the gratitude for all that You have done for me and through me. My prayer is always help me to love You more!

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PREFACE



Being a Christian is not just talk, or the latest fad. It is not the next “cool” thing to do, although we do live in an age and time when that is what people do. The sad thing is that when the “coolness” wears off we drop the fad like it was nothing.

Christianity is a lifestyle. It is a way of doing, hence the term, walking. If we are Christians, truly at heart, we tell the world by our actions and by the way we “do” things, that we have accepted and believe the teachings of Jesus Christ. In the very first century, early writers wrote that the sect that followed Jesus, or what was then becoming known as Christians, was known by their display of love and good deeds. Their very actions set them apart long before anyone heard the Good News.

Today we have name tags to identify us. I’m a Baptist, or I’m a Catholic, or I’m Full Gospel or Pentecostal. We have very little to identify us as “Christians” and the clear line that separates us from the world is getting thinner and thinner. Instead of unity, we have classification. Instead of grace, we are back to a list of do’s and don’ts. What has happened to our **WALK**?

This may sound a bit critical. Maybe it is, but judgement must come first to the church, the Body of Christ. Our salvation is an ongoing process, that only ends when our Savior comes back and calls His Bride, the church, to Himself. That day is getting closer, closer than most would like to see. We must look at ourselves in the light of His Holy Word. That is the Christian’s road map. If we follow it exactly, we will not wander off following some detour that will get us lost, but stay on the Highway that leads us home. Again, we are on a journey, a walk if you will. The directions are clear and the path is already laid out before us. We have the lighting to illuminate the way, all we need is the desire to be on our way.

This book is done with the hope that it will help light some of the way. You will notice that I use a lot of scripture references and a little exhortation. The scriptures will get you where you need to go. The exhortation only adds a little continuity to the thoughts expressed.

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Some of you will also notice that some of the work seems familiar. It should as this is a compilation of some of the articles I have written in booklet form before. There has been some extensive editing as well as some new material, so my hope and prayer is that this will refresh you and hopefully stimulate you in your walk with our Master and Lord. My objective has always been and always will be what Paul said to Timothy:

"But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."

-Timothy 1:5-

Yours In Christ,

Roland J. Ledoux

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WALKING IN LOVE



Love is the purification of the heart from self. It strengthens and ennoble the character, gives a higher motive and worthier aim to every action of life, and makes both man and woman courageous. The power to love truly and devotedly is the highest gift with which a human being can be endowed. -Endsor

Love is the doorway through which the human soul passes from selfishness to service and from solitude to kinship with all mankind. -Anonymous

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What has happened to our concept of what love is all about? High divorce rate, adultery, premarital sex happening at younger ages, teen pregnancies, the increasing rate of major teen violence, and murder, signs of the times you say?

You bet it is! But prophets of old up to the time of Jesus Christ predicted this. Humanistic teaching has gone on since long before Christ and yet with that teaching we are still slipping ever further from the truth as time goes by. Chaos, anarchy, insecurity, dishonesty and selfishness have not lessened with our increase of knowledge. Rather, they have increased as man has elevated himself to the throne of God.

Psychology and the social sciences have tried to put a finger on the causes since the birth of these sciences, but they have only added to the lie by denying where the true responsibility lies. The Bible is still the only source to turn to when man has questions about his relationship to one another as well as his standing in the eyes of God.

The Bible today, just as in the days of old, is still the barometer of human nature. It is the only true, solid source of whom we are, why we are, and where we're heading. As we check the pulse of the world today, we see the Bible's predictions stand as true as ever. Which poses the question, why is the world heading down this path?

Love should dominate our lives, our interaction with one another, yet it is one of the most misused and misunderstood words, in our vocabulary today. We use it at the drop of a hat, most of the time to manipulate or too illicit a response to our needs, not fully understanding it's deeper meaning. The very concept of what love is, no longer holds a scriptural meaning.

Sadly, this holds true for the church world as well as the secular world. The blame is not only on the "signs of the times," but also on our lack of teaching. To a great extent we have gotten away from some of the basics, in the home first, and yes, even in many of today's churches.

Quite hard accusations, I know, but you hear the word love tossed around home and church probably more than anywhere else. But it's a word that is freely used with oft times little thought behind it. This is mainly due to a lack of a deeper understanding of what it truly means.

I am not writing an exhortation condemning our homes or churches, or people in general, for that matter. I think it's time we as people think about what it is we are really saying and start backing it up with our deeds. It's high time we were taught exactly what love is and how to

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know it's love, and how to properly show it. My heart's cry is what Paul wrote to Timothy.

"But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."

-1 Timothy 1:5-

Again, there is only one solid source for us to turn to, the Holy Bible. But first we need to look at what the world's definition of love is. The New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary, Encyclopedic Edition, on page 588 describes the word love as this: a powerful emotion felt for another person manifesting itself in deep affection, devotion or sexual desire / the object of this emotion / God's regard for His creatures / charity (the virtue) / a great liking, fondness / etc.

These are just some of the definitions most accepted by the world in which we live. Even the dictionary falls short in its ability to capture the essence of true love. One of the reasons, is that when you do understand a truer, deeper love, the word alone isn't enough to express what a person can and does feel. Even it's definition of "God's regard for His creatures," leaves you feeling rather flat.

On the other hand, when you go to God's meaning, as found in the Bible, we see by a whole new light. The difference is as great as night and day. It's almost like comparing a real object to a two dimensional picture of that same object. A picture may be beautiful, but it is still flat and lifeless. Even a motion picture or video may seem to have life, but compared to the real things, it still lacks depth.

As an example, place yourself amongst a valley of colorful wild-flowers with snow-capped mountain peaks in the background. Now imagine the landscape dotted with beautiful swaying trees, a breeze gently blowing through your hair. Looking up, the sun's rays burst forth from a blanket of billowy clouds. Experience the feel and depth of such a scene, feel the awe of its beauty, then take a picture of it and give it to someone who has never been to that location before. They may find it to be the most beautiful picture they have ever seen, but the sense of realism isn't there. They cannot experience the awe that you felt. It's only an imitation of the real thing. Yet you can remember vividly the reality of it. It stays with you. So it is with God's love. What we have settled for is an imitation of the real thing, and God wants us to experience the actual article.

Unlike our English language, which has only one word to try to express the many aspects of love, the Hebrew and Greek have several words distinguishing the exact meaning a person is trying to convey. There are two main Greek words, namely, **agape** and **phileo**. Agape is the word used to describe a deep-seated affection, as in one who is dearly

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beloved, a benevolence, that transcends natural limitations, an unconditional affection. Phileo is the word used to describe a friendship, or platonic sentimental relationship. As you can see, there is a big difference between the two.

The kind of love that God does expresses to each of us is the agape love. The kind we most generally express to one another, is the phileo love. The Lord wants us to make a willful decision to practice agape love, the love that transcends phileo.

I realize that to some of you, this is not a new teaching, but my prayer for all is that whether this is familiar or new, the Holy Spirit will quicken it to your hearts again. The Lord wants a passionate and vibrant, loving people, not a lukewarm or complacent one.

The secret to a more rewarding life, is not just to acknowledge a truth as such, but to act upon it. You've heard the saying before, "Actions speak louder than words." We all take it as a true saying. Read James 1:22-25 and see if it isn't so.

"But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves."

-James 1:22-

We all know the story of the wise man who built his house on the rock, and how Jesus compared him to one who built on the sand. (Matthew 7:24-27 & Luke 6:47-49).

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man . . ."

-Matthew 7:24-

The key words in these scriptures refer to action and doing. Jesus was trying to teach the people that there was a better way and that there needed to be a change. The key to the Law wasn't just in the knowledge of the Law, but in the application of it. We experience the exact same problems today. Human nature hasn't changed. There are still a lot of Pharisees in the land today who speak the word. Just like in Jesus time, they have become teachers of the Law, but not doers themselves. What the Lord wants us to do is not just to hear it, and/or teach it, but we are to live it. With the doing we won't become like the Pharisees of the Lord's time. A lot of head knowledge with none of the heart. Read through the Gospel accounts and see how many times the Lord said, "*Woe unto you Pharisees.*" In Matthew 5:20, Jesus says we must surpass the doings of the Pharisees or we will lose Heaven (also read Matthew 16:11, 12, Luke 12:1). I am not trying to condemn anyone, but the Word of God is our ultimate judge, so in essence what I am saying is that we need to take these Gospel accounts to heart and submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit.

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“Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.”

-1 John 3:8-

Again, there is that action. Let us love in doing. Love, just as faith, compassion, hope, mercy, and a handful of other attributes are just words if they are not motivated to action. I can say, I love you, but unless it moves me in my everyday life to do something for you, unselfishly, it is nothing more than empty words. 1 John 3:16, 17 shows us the practical application.

We need to also understand the nature of love. First, God is not the creator of love! I will say that again, God is not the creator of love! God is love! Love is God's perfect nature, not just His attribute.

“God is Love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”

-1 John 4:16-

Verse 8 of the same chapter also says, “*God is love.*” Love is God's nature and God is love's nature. Love is living and vibrant and the highest spiritual attribute we can attain. It is the greatest attribute that will endure forever, even after many other things fade away (1 Corinthians 13:13).

John says in his first letter that as we love, we abide in God, and God abides in us (1 John 4:16). Abiding, or dwelleth, as the King James puts it, means in the original language, to endure, continue, to stay constant, as in a given place, stationary or solid. Think of the expression as solid as a rock. When we practice love, we abide in God, in His very nature, enduring, constant as a solid rock, and the best part of that is that His very nature abides in us doing exactly the same. It's no wonder it is so hard to try to describe perfect love.

What a miracle! That a man such as me, with all of my failings, and shortcomings, a person who through Adam, inherited the very sin nature that is enmity towards God, can actually dwell again in the presence and perfect nature of God!!!

This is the agape love that God wants us all to experience. This is the love that is available to all of mankind through God's own love to us in the Person of His Son Jesus Christ; the ultimate love example for the whole world (John 3:16-17).

“By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.”

-1 John 4:9-

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What a gift!! God, or His Love nature, was shown to us, in us, by His very Son, thereby allowing us to live through Him. In other words, God gave us the power and ability to return His love nature back to Him through our lives. What a great and awesome God!!

"He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."

-1 John 5:12,20-

Christ Jesus is our prime example of how to live love, how to show it by our actions.

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also."

-1 John 4:11,21-

Christ's life, His nature, His attributes are set out before us to follow, always pointing us to God, the Father (John 5:19-27). When we follow His examples, we can call ourselves Christian, Christ-like.

I've heard it argued that we cannot attain that level of perfection, but it is not opinion that counts, what does God's word tell us? Paul gave us a perfect description in his letter to the Philippians. In the third chapter he is contrasting works-righteousness, which is based on the Law, with faith-righteousness, which is from God through faith in Christ. We walk with a carnal covering, but we walk in the Spirit by faith.

"Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

-Philippians 3:12-14-

Paul is making it very clear that he has not arrived yet, but that he is still very much in the race to obtain the goal, which is perfection. He is inferring that this should be what motivates us all. We have not fully obtained the prize, but we are running as if the prize is just within our grasp. We strive, or push ourselves to obtain perfection.

Paul was addressing a problem of complacency that was already touching the church then. There was a form of teaching and thinking that we can never obtain perfection, through works, or faith, so it's okay to become self-satisfied with our past accomplishments. He

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argues that point in verse 13 *"forgetting what lies behind,"* don't become self-satisfied, *"reaching forward to what lies ahead,"* pressing and striving for what is within reach. Verse 14 tells us to keep our eyes on the goal, which is always the prize. In other words, let us not be distracted by the commotion around us, but keep moving forward.

"But when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away."
-1 Corinthians 13:10-

Paul is stating that when Christ, who is perfect comes, the incomplete will be done away. He goes on to show us in verses 11-13 that we are in a state of growth until Christ comes, but as we grow, as we strive to comprehend, to see clearly, the greatest attribute, which is love, will be clearly understood!

So the bottom line is this — as Christ was perfect, we are to strive or press toward that same goal, knowing in faith that it is a prize attainable to us and it will be fully realized in our expression and cultivation of love to one another.

Jesus would not have told us to do something that was not within our reach (read John 14:24, then I John 2:5).

"But whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected."

-1 John 2:5a-

You've heard the saying, "Practice makes perfect." He that keeps, in his heart, and does, by his action, God's word, God's love is realized in practice. It's a continuous work as long as we continue doing.

Satan would have you fear failure. He would have you believe perfect love is not attainable. That's what motivates him. We need to remember where those lies originate from. He wants to rob you of what is truly yours in Christ. He continues to use the same M.O. that he has used since Adam and Eve. Part of their problem that led to the fall was their fear that they were going to miss out on something. They were beginning to doubt God.

"For God has not given us the spirit of timidity, but of love and discipline."
-2 Timothy 1:7-

The King James version reads "the spirit of fear and of a sound mind." Fear does not come from our Father God. Fear is the opposite of faith.

"And without faith it is impossible to please Him."
-Hebrews 11:6a-

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God has given to us, as a gift, love and a sound mind, not the spirit of fear. Don't believe the devil's lies. Romans 8:15 and Galatians 5:1 tell us not to be slaves to fear. We have been redeemed, set free.

"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love."

-John 4:18-

The preceding verse, 17, says we can have confidence or boldness on the day of judgment because our love is perfected, or practiced, in Christ. The devil would have us believe otherwise, because he is very much aware of his fate. He knows he will be punished, but our faith, or lack of fear, in Christ allows us to know in all confidence and assurance that we will not suffer that same fate. We can therefore walk boldly before God, the Creator of this world and all there is, knowing His Spirit will lead us perfectly in His paths.

The Pharisees, with all their knowledge of the Law, were constantly trying to trick Jesus. One day they asked Him what the greatest commandment in the Law was, and without hesitation, He answered them.

"'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and foremost commandment, and a second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole law and the prophets."

-Matthew 22:37-40-

We can fulfill all the commandments if we would only be willing to act upon these words:

"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome."

-1 John 5:3-

All of God's laws and rules summed up into two easy commands, and the Holy Spirit gives us the strength and the power to love like that. The Lord never told us to do anything that was either impossible or unattainable through the power of His Spirit.

We have to do away with our fears and misconceptions of what real love is, agape love. There are many brothers and sisters, in leadership and out, who do not understand the depth of a true Godly love. When we talk with one another, we can sometimes expound on it, but when it comes to application or practice, oft times we miss the mark. We live in such a fast society, we don't even take time to think or examine our motives and actions. We just do, then think about it later. Many times we have to spend extra time in "damage control." God wants our thoughts and actions to be so immersed in Him that our deeds reflect

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His love to one another. That means, if we spend time in a prayer relationship with Him, and take time to read His word and meditate on it, we can many times save ourselves the hassle of having to correct mistakes we shouldn't have made.

We need to learn that when we do step out in faith, our loving one another almost invariably involves taking risks. God being all knowing, knew that not all of mankind would accept the sacrifice of His Son for our sins. Yet, even knowing that, His love was so great that He still went forth with His plan for our redemption(1 John 4:9-10, John 3:16-17).

We all know the story of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10:25-37. We've all heard how it demonstrates just who our neighbor is as well as how possible it is to demonstrate a great love for our neighbor, but let's look at it for a different reason. We all feel we know who our neighbor is, but a better correlation of the story would be the kind of love we are to show in spite of obvious rejection. The story relates to the Samaritan who finds a Jew left for dead. What isn't always known is that the Jews despised the Samaritans because of they're mixed Gentile blood and the way they worshiped, as well as where they believed worship should be directed. It was a very deep seated bias, bordering on hatred. If there was ever a fear of rejection in the offering of help, this Samaritan had to be aware of it. Yet, this is the exact type of love that Jesus chose to illustrate. Despite the very real chance of being openly rejected and despised, this man still chose to show his love by his very actions of caring for this man. Not only that, but it is obvious that he demonstrated no concern for recognition or compensation; his love was unconditional. This was the type of love that Jesus said in verse 37, ". . . *Go and do the same.*" In other words we are to rise above our natural fears and concerns and actively demonstrate what the world least expects. It has absolutely nothing to do with how we feel. We do that by walking in the Spirit.

We've already established the fact that Jesus Christ is to be our prime example of living a Godly, love centered life. In practical terms we apply the following principle:

"We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth."

-1 John 3:16-18-

We face the possibility of rejection just as our Lord and Savior did, with the understanding that our show of love is always greater than any hurt.

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Several years ago I went through some circumstances that allowed me to apply and also to contemplate that special love that the Father imparts to His children. My wife and I started attending a small church where we met a young couple involved in a business that was similar to what we had been involved in a few years earlier. At this time I was involved in a totally different career choice where I was making some good money. Actually, quite a bit more than we had ever made in the past, and we were enjoying some of the comforts the extra money was providing.

As we got to know this couple, we found out that they had struggled and prayed for several years for help. Their business was in the service field and they had acquired this business with no previous knowledge or experience in this field. They had received some technical help, but they needed help in other areas of administration and customer handling and they were struggling with the problems that the lack of that particular knowledge created.

As I began to pray for them, God first gave me a special love for them, then a burden for their business. The love and the burden grew as we continued to pray. It took me awhile to sense God's direction concerning them, partly due to the fact that I had turned my back on this career field sometime in my past.

As I continued praying, God showed me that I was to help them get on their feet and to do so would require some sacrifice on my part. I had told the Lord years before that I would go and do whatever He wanted me to do, no matter the cost. As in the past, He was taking me at my word. I prayed, not only for guidance, but also for guidelines that they would be able to recognize as coming from the Lord. Some of these guidelines would demand some firm changes on their part, as well as some minor sacrifices also.

As we communed in fellowship, I had expressed to them my burden for their business and my continued prayers for guidance. Then one day I asked to see them, and informed them of the guidelines that the Lord had laid on my heart if I was to help them. Their acceptance would be confirmation of the Lord's direction for their business. I asked them to pray and to seek an answer from the Lord and when they were comfortable they could let me know, one way or the other.

A little while later they agreed that this was God's direction for them. Motivated by my love for them and the desire to do what God wanted, I quit the job I had been on and started working for them. Through the several months of working for, and helping them, we made many sacrifices, affecting my wife and me as well as this couple. Many times I had to remind them of the direction that the Lord wanted to take their business. At times I had to be firm with both of them and to

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direct their gaze back to the ultimate goal, reminding them that God would see them through. Eventually, the striving for the necessary discipline became too great, and they became satisfied with past accomplishments and began to yearn for the way things had been. It was really easy for them at that point to develop a distracted view of what the real goal was.

Now the easiest thing to do in a situation like that would have been to just throw your hands up and to walk away; but God never takes His love from us, or leaves us. That is the same example we are to follow. After talking with them, they admitted that they thought that I was too harsh and unloving, that I was no longer flexible, therefore they had reached the place where they rejected any and all of my help.

At first I thought that I had failed them and therefore had let our Lord down. Through much prayer and conferring with other godly counsel I learned that what they had failed to see, in their race, was that it was the love behind the firm hand that was motivating them to discipline. God requires obedience of His children, and you cannot be obedient if you are always concerned about the consequences of that obedience. This is where faith comes into play. God is big enough, if He asks you to do something, to handle any situation that might arise out of your obedience; but He does ask for your faithfulness. This is where the discipline comes in; remember that discipline is an expression of God's love.

"You have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.' It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?"

-Hebrews 12:5-7-

It takes an understanding of God's love to care and to continue doing, even in the face of obvious rejection. This is a common concern throughout our homes and churches today. We need to get back to a basic understanding of God's all encompassing love. Remember that agape love motivates the spiritual part of man to do what his natural inclinations are not willing to do.

The world has coined a term, "tough love," meaning, that sometimes we have to show our love by doing things we wouldn't normally do to express that love. Some Christians have started to adopt this "new" concept, thinking that what's good for the world, we certainly can do better. That's so very sad! In actuality, God was the one Who originated "tough love." We should be living this in our lives every day, not just when it suits our needs or soothes our consciences. Remember, agape love is the love that transcends mere friendship

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"love." God wants us to go above what comes naturally and start living a life that's dominated by His Holy Spirit. Tough love, indeed! He's been telling us to love like that from the beginning.

The disciples walked side by side with Jesus and they certainly lived with this concept. Jesus had to rebuke James and John, "*the sons of thunder*," and to Peter He said, "*get thee behind Me Satan*" (Matthew 16:23, Luke 9:55). I can imagine Christians today that if their pastor or leadership were to "admonish" them, they would be storming off crying, "He doesn't love me anymore!" They'd probably quit church and let everybody know how badly they were treated. People, what has happened to us? Jesus' love for His disciples never dimmed or departed. He corrected them, yes, and He taught them. That He loves them always was never in question. That is exactly what the Holy Spirit wants to do with us and through us today. The Lord has not changed, but He wants us to. Sadly, we don't always recognize it or accept it, but that doesn't make it any less true. This leads us to another problem that is growing increasingly frequent. Just because we may disagree on something, we still have no excuse for not loving each other. Everyone at sometime or another will disagree on something. The scriptural principle though is that we are not to allow those disagreements to cause division, or to cause one another to stumble (1 Corinthians 1:10, Romans 14:13, 16:17). It's those differences that make us so unique. If the Lord is to be our example, and He can find it in His heart to love everyone, with all of their differences, then I think He can do the same not only in us, but through us also. Again, we need to stand above those natural feelings and walk by the spiritual principles that Christ commanded (Matthew 22:37-40).

When we can attain the ability to live by those commands, following Christ's example, we will see more and more souls coming into the Kingdom of God. People are always looking for something different. Our churches, our homes, will be filled with a hungry and thirsty people eager to learn more. They'll see what they want and need in us. In the early church people knew who the "Christians" were by their love.

Sadly, we have been getting satisfied with using the church building as just a place to socialize, and to soothe our consciences. We have become satisfied to use the one or two days a week to catch up on the latest news or gossip about each other. We have relegated our care for one another to a second hand love instead of an interactive first hand, Christ drive relationship. Jesus said in His letter to the churches that it was that kind of church that He would spit out of His mouth! (Revelation 3:16).

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"And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near."

-Hebrews 10: 24-25-

Yes, church is for edification and worship, but our gathering together should also be for the purposes of encouraging one another. Now this scripture is not just referring to the church building, as so many well-meaning Christians like to think, but also to the importance of frequent fellowship outside of the church building. This word in verse 24, stimulate, means in the original language, "to incite, to stir up as in a sudden explosive burst." This is a very strong usage. We are to think about how to stir one another up with explosive bursts of love. Can you imagine walking into a church or a small group of people and getting stirred up by an explosive burst of love with the encouragement to go out and allow others the same experience? That's exactly what the Lord is telling us to do through the writer of Hebrews.

We have become satisfied to let the leadership manifest our love to one to another. A greeting during church or a handshake at the entrance to the sanctuary, and we know so well that we are loved. Get real! Well, that's the pastor's job, or the elder's. In the meantime, pastors and lay ministers are assuming the congregation is showing love one to another. You give each other a greeting or a hug or handshake when you are told to during that part of the service that is destined to show outsiders just how much we love each other. We have come to the point where we truly believe that one another is performing the job that I, as an individual, am commanded to do.

We cannot allow the devil to continue to deceive us. We cannot allow his lies to continue to blind us or trick us into a feeling of false security.

"Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

-1 Peter 5: 8-

We have to remain alert. We have to recognize the danger signals when we see them. If we constantly assume that someone else is acting in love, and we are not, whom do we allow to fall into the clutches of our enemy, the devil?

"For you were called to freedom brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

-Galatians 5: 13-

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We have been given a freedom, but one that is to be used in service for each other. Hebrews 13:1 says, "*Let love of the brethren continue.*" (Italics mine). It is a continually ongoing process. Jesus came to give us the ultimate example; we are not our own, we were bought with a price and we are to serve one another.

"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor."

-Romans 12:10-

There is a lot of action spoken of in these verses, a lot of doing, a lot of deeds. You can see that a Christ-like, Christian lifestyle is a very busy lifestyle.

"Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ."

-Galatians 6:2-

The law of Christ is the two commands that Christ Jesus gave to us. We fulfill them by each doing our own part and not assuming someone else is doing them for us. We bear one another's burdens by serving one another and by esteeming our brethren above our own needs. In other words, if I do my part to show love, in action, and you do your part to show love through action, we hold one another up in strength, thus obeying the Scriptures to love one another.

"Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification."

-Romans 15:1-2-

Remember the saying, "United we stand, divided we fall." The devil's job is to divide and conquer, but the work of the Spirit is to unite.

"If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."

-Philippians 2:1-4-

"And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity."

-Colossians 3:12-14-

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This seems like an awful lot to do, but remember, it's the Holy Spirit who empowers us to love like this. Remember, Christ told us His burden was **light** (Matthew 11:30). It's much lighter than what the world has to offer with its fear and insecurity.

Many Christians today profess a willingness to die for the Lord, but how many of us are willing to live for Him. Reread 1 John 3:16 again with that thought in mind. God doesn't expect us to die for one another; Christ already did that, once and for all, for all of mankind (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). The Lord expects us to live for each other. If we lay our lives down for one another, it is not to death, but to life. Hatred takes life, but love gives life. The fruit of love is the giving of life.

The nature of God's love is such that the more I give away, the more I receive to give away. God's love is totally and absolutely free. We are not worthy of it, we can't earn it or merit it. He dispenses it to us freely. The Lord wants us to do the same thing. He wants us to spread it around, to give it out, unconditionally.

God desires an abiding love relationship with His people, one that is moment to moment, not one that is scheduled. He wants us to make His love a lifestyle, and not just by appointment only. That kind of lifestyle, demands an intimate knowledge of the One we love. The only way to develop that kind of relationship in our lives is to read more of His Word and to communicate with Him more. Yes, prayer is the best way to communicate, but I'm not talking about a scheduled forum, but a constant two-way communication that is available to all His children. The way we develop any relationship with one another is through constant communication, and that is the way we do it with God our Father. Unlike natural relationships, the Lord will never desert us or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6; Hebrews 13:5). He is there by our sides, in our hearts constantly. We don't need to make an appointment to speak to Him.

We have to ignore the devil's lie; that we can't love like God wants us to. I think it's high time we stop letting the world dictate what is right and wrong to us, and start following the leading of the Holy Spirit and the example of Jesus Christ, laid out for us in Holy Scriptures.

Divine love, from Christ abiding, remaining constant, in us and us in Him, brings about unity. Our love for one another is a clear sign to the world. The world was always looking for a sign, even in the Lord's day, and the world certainly hasn't changed (Matthew 12:38-39). Let's give them the right sign, one that will point to a positive direction. God's love shows no favorites. He loves those in fellowship with Him as well as those not in fellowship (Luke 9:56, John 3:16-17).

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God loved us before He even created us. Just as His love for us took us off the road to wreck and ruin, we are to demonstrate that same love to one another.

"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma."

-Ephesians 5: 1-2-

It's been said that we love that which is lovely and lovable; but the love that God's Holy Spirit empowers us with, is the love that makes the unlovely, lovable also.

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known my Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him."

-John 14:6-7-

Jesus is the only way to know God in His fullness and to abide in Him. From this point on, we not only know Him, but our lives are also in Him, through Christ. We can be rock solid, abiding in His love nature.

This is the message to all of us: we must will our spiritual nature to take precedent over our fleshly carnal nature. We must strive, pursue and chase after God's love and His loving ability.

Paul told Timothy to flee from worldly things and to, pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart(2 Timothy 2:22; 1 Timothy 6:11). We do this through Christ's example and the power of His Holy Spirit. He is the only way we can accomplish this. It is His Spirit that guides us and empowers us. We must accept it, walk in it and claim it as ours in faith.

Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, California, once said, "True love is manifested not in our thoughts, however beautiful; not what we feel, however strongly; not in our words, however sweet; but in our deeds in practical, genuine, self-sacrificing activities."

There is much power in love, much strength in its outward manifestation. There are many rewards that we receive by doing that which God asks us to do in obedience. He is asking us to rise above the world, to rise above the natural and to accomplish that which the Spirit is leading us into. Only you can do it for yourself.

"For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints."

-Hebrews 6:10-

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God's promises are from everlasting to everlasting; we can stand rock solid on them. The challenge in loving, will be to meditate on His words and do as He says, then discover the rewards for ourselves.

I've only covered the tip of the iceberg when it comes to understanding and showing God's love, but the bottom line is to just do it. My prayer for all of us as God's children, is that the blinders will be drawn back from our eyes, and that the spiritual agape love of His nature will flow out from each of our hearts to a hungry, thirsty world ready to receive. May we continue to grow in understanding and application. His love is the only way to answer the question as to whether or not there will be love, in our future, as well as our eternity.

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Truth lies in character. Christ did not simply speak the truth; he was Truth-Truth through and through, for truth is a thing not of words but a life and being. -Robertson

Keep one thing forever in view-the truth; and if you do this, though it may seem to lead you away from the opinion of men, it will assuredly conduct you to the throne of God. -Mann

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"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eyesalve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to Him, and will dine with him, and he with Me. He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

-Revelation 3:14-22-

A lukewarm people, neither passionate nor vibrant, Christ standing outside His own church, knocking to be let in. Is this a warning against large scale and individual apostasy? You bet! But just what is apostasy, and just how serious is it? The Bible describes it in many ways. It is the deliberate turning away from a known truth, no matter how it was received.

"They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed."

-Titus 1:6-

"But the Spirit explicitly says that in the later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons."

- 1 Timothy 4:1-

It is a willful departure from your faith. Read 2 Timothy 3:1-7. People also are not willing to endure sound doctrine. They are people that want what they want, and they want it their way. Paul warned Timothy of this.

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires."

-2 Timothy 4:3-

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Apostates are people who have forsaken the right way after knowing that it was the right way. It is not an accidental falling away, but rather a turning away made with conscious effort. A good example from the scriptures would be the Pharisees. They knew the truth, and they just didn't want any part of it.

"For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame."

-Hebrews 6:4-6-

Peter said they were people who had forsaken the truth to go astray(2 Peter 2:15). They are definitely people looking for what they can gain from their experiences. With all the financial scams that are being practiced on people in this day and age, religion is starting to come out strong in the profit arena.

"These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit."

-Jude 19-

In Luke 8:11-15, Jesus tells us the parable of the planted seed of God. In verse 13 He describes the people who are like the rocky soil. He says that these people believe for a while and in time of temptation they fall away. The meaning in that scripture "to fall away" literally means, "apostatize." In the first part of John's second letter in verse 9, John warns us of straying too far from the gospel or teaching of Christ. By straying we actually "fall" out of fellowship with our Heavenly Father.

The Bible is full of warnings and examples of apostasy. In Jude 11, the author gives us three Old Testament examples of obvious apostasy. Cain, for his rejection of God's provision for Godly acceptance is one. Today, it would be one who is rejecting God's forgiveness through Christ. Judas was an example in the New Testament. In the Old, Balaam is another example who characterizes deceit and covetousness (Numbers 22-24, 2 Peter 2:5, Revelation 2:14). Korah is the third person in the Old, and he characterizes outright rebellion (Numbers 16). Apostates despise government and speak evil of authority (2 Peter 2:10, Jude 8). Rather than praying for our leaders as Paul

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commands in Romans, they curse and defy their leaders, not caring that God is the one who gives authority as well removes it (Romans 13:1-6).

Apostasy leads to false teaching. It is the spirit of antichrist spoken of and warned against in countless scripture. It is the spirit that Christ said would be on the rise in the last days.

"And every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that is coming, and now it is already in the world."

-1 John 4:3-

This spirit is just as true and real today as it was in John's day. All we have to do is look around to see the evidence of its influence, not only in the secular world, but in many of our churches also.

"Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not really of us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us. For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist."

-1 John 2:18-19, 2 John 7-

The New Testament is full of descriptions of what to look for and ways to identify false teachers; even Jesus predicted the rise of many antichrists when He confided in His disciples while assembled on the Mount of Olives.

"And Jesus answered and said to them, 'See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. Then if anyone says to you, "Behold, here is the Christ," or "There He is," do not believe him. For false Christ's and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect."

- Matthew 24:4-5, 11, 23-24, Mark 13:5-6, 21-23-

Jesus used Matthew 7:15-20 to also show us how to identify them when they slip in amongst us. Ravenous wolves, seeking only to satiate their own hunger, wily, because they don't want to be noticed. But their fruit cannot be hidden, and Jesus promised us that we will know them by their fruits. Someone can say they are a Christian or prophet, and they may look or talk the part, but a wolf can only

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produce wolves. A wolf has never produced a sheep, no matter how hard it has tried. By the same analogy, an orange tree will never produce apples. We must be wary, and we must be sober and watchful.

John Bevere, in his book entitled, **The Bait of Satan**, says this of false prophets, "They are self-seeking men who give the appearance of being Christians (sheep's clothing) but have the inward nature of a wolf. Wolves like to hang around sheep. They can be found in the congregation as well as in the pulpit. They are sent by the enemy to infiltrate and deceive. They must be identified by their fruits, not by their teachings or prophecies. Often the teaching can appear sound whereas the fruit in their lives and ministries is not. A minister or a Christian is *what he lives*, not what he preaches." (Chapter Two, Page 14)

This brings up the issue of judging. We need to be wary and judge the things we hear and the things that are given to us as teaching. John said that we should "test" the spirits to see whether they are of God, again being wary of false prophets (1 John 4:1). When I was a young man, I would have argued with anyone that we do not under any circumstances, have the right to judge another person. According to the first few verses in Matthew 7, this seems to be the case, and yet, in verse 5 we are told that once we have cleaned ourselves up, then we are able to help others. As I have matured in the Lord, I have come to realize that I have a greater responsibility toward the gifts and calling that our Father has graced me with. The more a person receives or has received, the more responsibility is required of that person. To whom much is given, much is required. We are not to judge frivolously, and we are not to judge another's heart motive. Only God can see the heart. The only instance this would change would be if the Holy Spirit is revealing a heart condition for a specific purpose or need in that person's life. But when we do judge, especially concerning disobedience, we can do so with a balance of discernment. Discernment is a spiritual gift given freely by the Holy Spirit. Verses 15-20 are telling us how to discern false prophets and teachers.

We will be judged, but it will be by Jesus Christ, and that by His Word, but He did command us to be on our guard and to be wary. Jesus gave so many discourses on the subject because of its importance to the future church and to His bride.

"He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; . . . Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber.....Jesus therefore said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them.....The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they

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might have life and might have it more abundantly.....These things I have spoken to you, that you may be kept from stumbling."

-John 7:18, 10:1, 7-8, 10, 1 John 16:1-

The Apostle Paul was very vocal in his attacks on the false teachers of his day. While he was on his way to Jerusalem, he called the elders of the church of Ephesus to him, to warn them of the attacks that they could expect.

"I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears."

-Acts 20:29-31-

Now think about what these scriptures are saying. Paul was so concerned for the church that for three years he stayed and admonished them, with his tears! He knew how strong and fierce the attacks would be so he stayed that he might strengthen them. Paul was evidently not as concerned about a frontal attack either. Notice that he warned them of the attack from within. These teachers would appear to be just like us. The Word says they would rise up from among us; they would appear to be our very own! Jesus called them wolves in sheep's clothing! If our churches ever needed to be on their guard, it is definitely so today. In our opportunities to serve in various churches, we have seen this come to light! It has been said that the enemy is more faithful to attend church than many Christians!

"As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;- "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them."

-Ephesians 4:14, 5:6-7-

Wherever Paul went, he was very much aware of the teachings and persecutions that would follow; but he was also very much aware of their origins. In his letter to the Galatians, he was very much concerned about the apostasy and the false teaching that had crept in so quickly to the infant church, and he was very quick to address the problem.

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"I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed."

-Galatians 1:6-9-

That is really strong language for a Christian! Now this may seem to be a hard thing; after all we have been taught it isn't right to be confrontational, but even today Paul should be our example, as he followed the example of Christ (1 Thessalonians 1:6). We definitely don't have the time to play church games with these cults that come knocking on our doors, trying to win our children over. If Paul felt concern for the time left the church then, how much more should we feel concern today? Paul certainly didn't sound as if he was concerned with offending someone who was teaching a contrary gospel; he sounded like he was more concerned for the church's well-being, which was of course, his expression of love. What a beautiful example!

In just about every letter that Paul wrote, as well as letters from the other Apostles, we see references to the "ravenous wolves," and false teaching; yet today, you hardly ever hear a preacher or teacher telling us how to be on our guard. With so many scriptures giving us warnings, do you ever wonder why it is that we still allow so many false teachings to gain a foothold?

Following is a listing of scriptures that go along with identifying what to look out for: Romans 16:17-18, 1 Corinthians 15:33, 2 Corinthians 6:14, Colossians 2:8, 18, 23, 1 Timothy 1:3-7, 6:3-5, 2 Timothy 3:13, 2 Peter 2:1-3, 3:3-4. Some of the predictions are so close to what some of these false prophets even say.

In the light of the power of the Holy Spirit in this age, how is it possible that people like Jim Jones and David Korasch are even allowed to start? The answer of course is simple and scriptural, apostasy. It's here today and we have become people fearful of pointing it out for fear of offending others.

"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love."

-1 John 4:18-

"For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline."

-2 Timothy 1:7-

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The King James version of the Bible states that we have not been given the spirit of fear, but rather the spirit of power and love and a sound mind. Listen to what that is telling you. If you do operate in fear, you do not have power, you do not have love, and you do not operate in sound thinking. That is why the enemy wants to keep people in an attitude of fear all the time! You won't think straight! Paul certainly wasn't fearful or timid as we've seen, and you can't say that he wasn't operating in power and love. If we love, there is no room for apostasy in our hearts; it can't reside there and then we can walk in the power of Christ. The early apostles were not afraid of offending, but they were afraid of not loving the flock of Jesus Christ enough!

As Christians, we now live in a day and age where we are fearful to walk in the light of some scriptures. We are more fearful of what someone might think, than we are of whether we're pleasing God or not. If the scriptures are our guidelines and the Holy Spirit is our confirmation, there should be no room for doubt, which you already know is the opposite of faith. If you were to approach a pastor or leader in today's church and question a portion of their teaching, not being critical or judgmental, mind you, even if you were being led by the Spirit, you would be considered a troublemaker; probably looked upon as an apostate. You would be branded as a troublemaker and you could bet that word would get around about your "problems." Most leaders would take some of these very scriptures and use them to mark you; not stopping to pray or consider that just maybe the Holy Spirit is using you to strengthen the body. Try and find fellowship then. I'm not just talking about the local church, either. There has been more than one well renowned teacher or minister approached about some aspect of teaching, in a spirit of love and concern, and the brother or sister who broached the subject has been criticized and/or ridiculed for stepping out of line. There have been a few well-known writers who have fallen into this category. Yet, there have been a few instances reported, where the confronted party did take the criticism with love, prayed about it and sought the Lord, with the result of changing their teaching to conform to scripture.

"Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissension and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them."

-Romans 6:17-

"Do not be carried away by varied and strange teaching; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace"

-Hebrews 13:9-

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By varied and strange teachings. The devil loves this one. We have a tendency of always searching for the next big thrill or fad in church circles. So and so hears of a new preacher in town with a new twist to scripture. They tell their friends, and they tell theirs and so on and on. Or, maybe it's the latest bestseller that has come on the market telling of some miracle formula found in the Bible. Everybody rushes out to buy it, and yet, how often is it compared in the light of scripture? Sometimes, it seems, when it comes to spiritual moves of God, we have a short attention span; this is just what the devil looks for.

As more and more people are asking questions and searching for answers, there are movements, such as the New Age movement, that are quick to provide the religious answers, many times with "signs and wonders." Many of its answers do contain a morsel of truth, but it covers a huge lie. Remember Jesus' temptation in the wilderness? Satan used scripture in every instance. He just twisted them to suit his need or only gave partial scripture. Sadly, many well-meaning churches have allowed some of the New Age practices to be incorporated into their services and teachings. Listen, this is not fable, it is happening in our churches today! I have lived and fought spiritual warfare in communities where this is going on right now! It's understandable with all of the seminars that are possible to attend that it can be very easy to accept someone's new teaching and accept them, if the people doing the teaching have a charming or charismatic personality.

As we continue to look for the "signs and wonders" as Jesus predicted, we allow wolves disguised as sheep to enter the fold. Remember Jesus said they were false "prophets" deceiving with signs and wonders. If we allow complacency to set in, such as in the Revelation church of Laodemia, we allow our guard down, allowing some of these falsehoods and principles to come in. Then we are caught unawares. Jesus said that a little leaven, leavens the whole lump. It doesn't take much myth to compromise the truth. The sad fact is that a partial truth, no matter how "deep" is still a whole lie! Paul was so concerned in his day about the ideas and myths of his time being incorporated into Christian teaching that he wrote the letter to the Colossians to combat this tendency.

It's true that some of these teachings creep in by some very well meaning teachers, but if we have abandoned or forgotten the safeguards the Lord has given to us; once rooted, these teachings are very hard to extricate. We depend on one another, and we need one another. We can't afford to be left out of fellowship with one another.

"In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Jesus Christ, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. Prescribe and teach these things."

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-1 Timothy 4:6,11-

We have allowed the devil to trick us in a big way! In our eagerness to serve the Lord, such as Martha did, we have allowed our eyes to get on what we are doing, instead of focusing on the source of our deeds. After all, the Lord should **always** be in our minds. We should never forget that He, and He alone, is our source. "Without Him I can do nothing"; with Him, all things are possible. Our united goal should be to see souls led into the Kingdom of God, and to serve one another. Let's get back on track. Sometimes we need to concentrate on being a Mary and not so much being a Martha. Only in the intimate fellowship with our Lord do we find the wisdom to know in which direction we are to proceed as far as doing is concerned.

Have you ever wondered why it seems so easy, in the religious world, to follow the "voice in the desert" when the scriptures are so available to everyone? Jesus Christ told us there would be many coming claiming to be Him and claiming to be from Him.

"Being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness."

-Ephesians 4:18-19-

We've all read what Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 4:3-4. Also, read 2 Corinthians 4:3-4. Sounds just like Jim Jones and David Korasch, doesn't it? Read 1 Timothy 6:3-5. All you have to do is turn your television set on to see these scriptures played out in our news broadcasts.

The devil's tactics haven't changed one bit through the ages. He is still using the same bag of tricks with the same motives in heart. Jesus told the disciples, that the thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10a). Jesus is talking about Satan, and the devil's only motive is to rob you of what is rightfully yours, even if he has to kill and destroy to do it. There is nothing that proceeds from the devil that is not meant to accomplish that task.

He is out to rob the very elect of God, if possible, because we are the only ones who have treasure that is worth stealing or destroying. He wants what he doesn't have and can never have. We need to stay on guard, for ourselves as well as for one another. We've already covered what Jesus warned us about in Matthew 24:24 and Mark 13:22. The devil will try to mislead, if possible and right away we need to be aware of his tactics; he'll try anything to deceive man. He is cunning. Trickery is his tool, but these scriptures give us hope because Jesus

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said, "if possible." Remember that he is subtle. We should never underestimate our enemy. Believe me, he does all he can to learn our weaknesses. Why shouldn't we as warriors be doing the same?

We shouldn't allow familiarity of any scripture to pacify us. We should never take a nonchalant view of any warnings that are written down for our benefit. They were written for our protection and spiritual survival.

"Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

-1 Peter 5:8-

"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore, it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds."

-2 Corinthians 11:13-15-

We can not believe everything we see or hear. Remember that the scriptures give us many safeguards. Do not forget that Matthew 7:15-20 came from Jesus Himself. These teachers may exude charisma and charm. They may speak fluently and eloquently. The real test is; do they serve, or do they demand to be served? Remember, the Lord's children were commanded to **serve** one another in love.

The only sure way to be prepared and to protect yourself is, of course, to be immersed in God's word, and in His nature by developing a consistent prayer relationship with Him, thereby abiding in Him. "Abiding," in the original language, means to "remain, to be constant, solid and secure."

"As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life. These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him."

-1 John 2:24-27-

Verse 27 doesn't mean we can't profit from teaching; after all Ephesians 4:11-14 tells us that the Lord Himself gave us ministries to

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help in our teaching that we would not be deceived but strengthened and built up in Him. What verse 27 is also saying can be backed up by John 16:13 which tells us that the Spirit will teach us how to distinguish truth from error. Paul also told us that:

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

-2 Timothy 3:16-17-

He said for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and training. We will almost always acknowledge teaching and training, but what about reproof and correction? Paul wrote this under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This must mean that by and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, just as teaching and training is important, so we can also move out in the area of reproof and correction as long as the Scriptures are behind it, and, this is an important and, we have judged our own heart motive first. Wow! No criticism, no ridicule, is warranted if I follow the scriptures **and** the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

"For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our **instruction**, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." (Emphasis mine).

-Romans 15:4-

We are accountable to God for our individual salvation as well as our personal walk. It is so very important that we start recognizing our personal responsibility in our personal walk. Paul was talking to Timothy about those that want to teach, but what he had to say was every bit as important to you and me as individuals.

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth."

-2 Timothy 2:15-

In other words, we are going to stand before God Almighty and have to answer to Him as to how **we** handled His word, not just in the giving of it, but also in the hearing of it. Have we accepted the truth as it has been given, and have we discarded or corrected that which was false? The importance of knowing the truth in our own lives was also expressed by the psalmist.

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"Make me know Thy ways, O Lord; Teach me Thy paths. Lead me in Thy truth and teach me, for Thou art the God of my salvation; for Thee I wait all the day." "Teach me Thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a level path, because of my foes."

-Psalm 25: 4-5, Psalm 27: 11-

Psalm 27:11 shows another importance for personal truth: protection.

"Teach me Thy way, O Lord; I will walk in Thy truth; unite my heart to fear Thy name."

-Psalm 86:11-

We must study for ourselves, and yet, in love, serve one another.

"Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

-Colossians 3:16-

Paul also told Timothy that if we are to help teach one another, we should:

"Refuse ignorant and foolish speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. And the Lord's bondservant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will."

-2 Timothy 2:23-26-

"Holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict."

-Titus 9-

Paul let Titus know in these scriptures the importance of knowing the word personally so that if need be, we can refute the falsehoods that do arrive. It's very important that we have that understanding, first in our lives, then secondly, as an act of service to one another, whether it is teaching, exhorting, etc. Hebrews carries it one step further:

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"But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

-Hebrews 3:13-

This sums up the importance of fellowship and sharing the word of God with each other. This following scripture has always been associated with going to church, but I would challenge you to look at it in the light of the scripture we just quoted above.

"And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near."

-Hebrews 10:24-25-

How can we encourage each other, if we don't have the word of God abiding in us? What other kind of encouragement is there aside from this, especially any that is lasting?

If we can understand the principle of laying a foundation of study upon our own walk first, we wouldn't be so devastated when the people we place on pedestals, fall. Of course, we probably wouldn't put them on pedestals in the first place. Rather, we would be able to lend our strength in support, rather than to fall headlong after them. We are all human, and as such, imperfect, striving for perfection.

"Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that . . ."

-Philippians 3:12-

Wouldn't it be great if we could, in our imperfections, practice what Paul wrote to Romans:

"Now we who are strong ought to bear the weakness of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for **his** good, to **his** edification." (Emphasis mine).

-Romans 15:1-2-

Instead we have a habit, when those who have been in the limelight fall; we fall headlong after them.

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I remind you again, according to Matthew 7:1 we are not to judge those that fall. 1 Corinthians 10:12 says we are to be aware of our own situation lest we fall also. We are not to judge them in the Lord; we are to pray and support them in love. I bring these things up to point out the fact that we protect ourselves from the hurt of their falls, by abiding in, and understanding God's word for ourselves. Remember, we are the branches and He is the Vine. Our strength only comes to us as we remain rooted or grafted to Him. Our walk is a very personal one, but the strength to keep standing is in the Lord's hands and when and if we do stumble, the Lord is there.

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy . . ."

-Jude 24-

See also Psalm 37:23-24 and Psalm 145:14. We need to remember that our very lives should be an offering of worship to the Lord. Jesus said:

"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

-John 4:23-24-

In verse 24 worship was originally spelled "worth ship." We need to acknowledge God's worth in Spirit; in contrast to material things, and in truth; in contrast to falsehoods. We can guard ourselves against further falsehoods by the weapons which He supplies to us individually.

"Our faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."
"In the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left." "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses."

-1 Corinthians 2:5, 2 Corinthians 6:7, 10:4-

False teachings and cults are on the rise. As more people are searching for truth, there is going to be more people with an offering of a half truth. While studying for this article, I ran across a television special on religions and cults. While watching this special, it was very

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eerie; because Jesus Christ the Redeemer of mankind was hardly even mentioned, even in the so-called Christian sects. There was a lot of talk about belonging, but little about love. Many people were willing to serve a man or a group of people that are little different from themselves, but the giver of salvation is being ignored; at the least, He's "elevated" to the status of a great teacher. Since this was first written, I have witnessed an influx of countless ads on television for psychic and tarot card readings. The sad part is that people are spending hundreds of dollars of their hard earned money searching for a false hope. There is a regular program on one television channel where a man will talk to your dead relatives and friends. This is becoming quite a hit show! The United Nations just sponsored their conference on world religions. Many of the keynote speakers were talking about uniting, at the same time they were condemning the short sightedness of the world's Christians!

People, God does ask for our lives to be dedicated to Him, but don't be misled, God is not a church building or a religious organization; **we** are the church. We have to walk by the Holy Spirit and not by flesh: mine or yours. When **any** church or group, however small or large, makes itself out to be exclusive, beware!! You do not need a building to reach God. God is a personal God and He is big enough for everyone that He created. We have allowed some of these very concepts into our churches, because it is the easy way. We need to start pursuing God's way; confess our lukewarmness and repent. It is only too late after the Lord returns. I am not an advocate of abandoning church. The church and daily fellowship **is** important, but more importantly we need to show love to one another, and encourage each other. Let's start listening to what the Spirit is saying to the churches; let's stop "playing" church and start "being" the church!

We are in the last days! The predictions of the Bible, the "signs of the times," all point to the inevitable: Christ is coming back!! We probably don't even have the luxury of saying He is coming soon. We may not know the day nor hour but the season of is coming is already here. He is not coming back for a Laodicean type church. He is coming for a vibrant, loving, passionate people "without spot or wrinkle." He is coming back for a Bride that has eyes for **only** Him.

On his second missionary journey, Paul left Thessalonica because of the dissension of the Jews caused due to his preaching. He went to Berea and preached in the synagogue there. Luke wrote this of that missionary journey:

"Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men."

-Acts 17:11-12-

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What a wonderful concept! Imagine going to church, or participating in fellowship in your homes and you can't wait to receive the word; you are actually eager to receive it, like someone hungering for a banquet. Then when you do receive it, you are excited to be able to feast upon the Word by examining and searching it to verify the truth of it. That is what set the Bereans apart. They were serious about the Word of God and the impact it had on their lives. That is the type of people that God wants to worship Him.

If we are to survive the wiles of the ravenous wolves, and the deceit of the false prophets, and if we are to serve one another in truth and in love, then we must be like those Bereans. We must be eager and willing to receive the word, but we must also be willing to be accountable for what we receive by studying the Scriptures daily to verify the word received as truth. That is our right and responsibility in Christ. We don't study to find faults; we don't study to lord it over others, but we study to verify truth. If I practice discerning truth from error, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and I seek to verify the Lord's words, I can keep my garments "wrinkle free and spotless" for Christ's return. I am one who is looking forward to His soon return. Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

WALKING IN FORGIVENESS



He who cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass if he would ever reach heaven; for every one has need to be forgiven. - Herbert

They, who forgive most, shall be most forgiven. - Bailey

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Forgiveness of sin is one of the component parts of justification. Forgiveness and justification go hand in hand. In pardoning sin, God takes into account the work of Christ thus absolving the sinner from the condemnation of the law, he removes the guilt of sin, and the sinner's actual liability to eternal wrath on account of it. All sins are freely forgiven (Acts 5:31, 13:38, 1 John 1:6-9). The sinner is, by this act of grace, forever freed from the guilt and penalty of his sins. It is offered to all who would accept in faith the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses."

-Acts 13:38-39-

Make sure you fully comprehend what you are reading, this is speaking about the wonderful remission, obliteration and wiping away of our sins through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This is the very foundation of our faith concerning our relationship with Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. This is the very attribute that is required of us to be able to enter into the throne room of our Heavenly Father boldly. Jesus is our example, if we dare call ourselves Christian, Christ-like.

Did you know that in the King James version of the Bible, in the Old Testament alone, forgiveness is mentioned in one form or another 51 times and that in the New Testament it is used 59 times? This is not counting the times the word pardon is used. This alone should tell us that forgiveness is an important subject in God's eyes, and not something to be trifled with. It is the basis for our belief in salvation as well as the basis for God's mercy and compassion toward man. This is the foundation for the New Covenant between God and man and we certainly do not want to continue under the Old one, since Christ has freed us from it.

The Bible speaks of forgiveness in two ways: first, God's forgiveness to man, and second, man's forgiveness to one another. God's forgiveness relates to our salvation, by which God pardons our sins, and man's forgiveness relates to the relationship we have with each other. Sadly, there is a teaching that is creeping into the church that minimizes the necessity or importance of our forgiveness one to another, and it is based almost solely on one scripture. I believe that it is a ploy of the enemy, a partial truth that is used to justify an unwilling heart to forgive another. I have said it before, if it is only partially true, then it is all false. In the Kingdom of God, there is no shady area of truth. Only the father of lies would try and make us

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believe otherwise.

Before getting into the scripture in question, it would be helpful to have some background on the concept of forgiveness. Forgiveness can be considered as the freedom from the just and moral anger and resentment of God against sin. According to Isaiah 59:2, our sins separate us from Him and His face is hid from us. That is putting it mildly. Sin is abhorrent to God and it has no place even **near** His nature. Consider what it takes to make you sick to your stomach. What brings on the queasiness and shaking that accompanies the nausea. You get the picture. You will do whatever is necessary to avoid that feeling. If it is a food, you won't go near it, if a smell, you will do all to escape it. I know this is not the most perfect illustration, but just imagine how much worse the Father feels about sin. It goes against His very nature.

But as stated earlier, forgiveness can also be considered a release from the guilt and condemnation from sin. God sees us, the believer in Christ, as without sin or guilt. This is where justification comes in. It is the judicial act of God, by which he pardons all the sins of those who believe in Christ, and accounts, accepts, and treats them as righteous in the eyes of the law, that is, as conformed to all its demands. In addition to the pardon of sin, justification declares that all the claims of the law are satisfied in respect to the justified. The law is not relaxed or set aside, but is declared to be fulfilled in the strictest sense. So the person justified is declared to be entitled to all the advantages and rewards arising from perfect obedience to the law (Romans 5: 1-10).

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us."

-Romans 8: 1, 33-34-

Christ Jesus fulfilled the Law, and not just with the **copy** of heavenly things, but in heaven itself. This forgiveness from God, our Father, is revealed in the Book of Hebrews 9:22-28. It is important to read and understand these verses fully for a solid foundation. These verses are the basis of our Christian walk.

"And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."

-Hebrews 9:22-

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He fulfilled this obligation on our behalf and all we have to do is to believe and accept it. Paul assures us in Romans of this fact:

"That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."

-Romans 10:9-10-

God gladly forgives us because He desires us to be returned to Him in right standing.

"For Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in loving-kindness to all who call upon Thee."

-Psalm 86:5-

"It is Thou who has kept my soul from the pit of nothingness, for Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back."

-Isaiah 38:17-

"Who is a God like Thee, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love. He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depth of the sea."

-Micah 7:18-19-

Our right standing before God was accomplished through Christ Jesus.

"And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,..."

-Colossians 2:13-

"I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake."

-1 John 2:12-

I hope that you can see a pattern established here for God's

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forgiveness to us. His love was so great that as John 3:16-18 points out, His Son was our avenue of forgiveness. God's unconditional agape love is what motivated and continues to motivate Him to forgive us, and it is this same agape love that should motivate us to forgive one another.

That is just a little background into the forgiveness of God towards His creation, man. We could write a whole book just devoted to that aspect of forgiveness and justification, but now I want to turn our attention to the other facet of forgiveness, namely man's forgiveness to his fellow man. This type of forgiveness is just as important as the other; for if we have the Father's forgiveness but are unwilling to duplicate that in our relation to our fellow man, we negate the forgiveness that we did receive so graciously from the Father (Matthew 6:14-15). This type of forgiveness is not an act dependent upon how we feel, but rather, it is dependent upon our obedience to the Father, and Jesus Christ.

Just as forgiveness restores our once broken fellowship with God, our Father, so it is with one another. If we are willing to walk in that spirit of forgiveness, we can overcome stumbling blocks and maintain Christian unity and fellowship with each other. That's why this teaching that is finding it's way into our churches can be so devastating to our unity as believers.

The scripture in question is Luke 17:3, **"Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him."** Jesus made this statement to His disciples. In the original Greek the word rebuke means to admonish, but the teaching that is being given in our churches and several books published is that if a brother or sister does not repent, you do not have to forgive. Forgiveness is all based on the repentance of the offending party. I for one cannot believe how this even enters into the mind of someone who professes to be a Christian! This so goes against what the majority of scriptures teach and also attacks the spirit of the Word. This reminds me of what Paul said to the Corinthians when he said that the "letter kills, but the spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6). The New Living Translation states this same verse the following way:

"This is a covenant, not of written law, but of the Spirit. The old way ends in death; in the new way, the Holy Spirit gives life."

First, we need to be careful that we do not isolate scriptures for our own means; in other words, to make scripture say or justify our actions and motives. There is a habit today of making scriptures conform to our lifestyles, rather than making our lifestyles conform to God's word. This is the most dangerous practice that we can get into. Secondly, isolating scripture and not balancing them with the rest of

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scripture is just as dangerous and irresponsible. It has always been possible to take scripture out of context and to make them say whatever we want them to say. This, however, is neither responsible nor wise. This is why so many unregenerated people who try to read the Bible say that it is contradictory. These are the words of our Heavenly Father to His heirs. They are spiritual words of life and therefore need to be discerned by the spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14). If our spirit is not reborn or renewed we haven't a chance of understanding the Word of God. The best we could hope for is to intellectualize the word and that is just as bad as not spiritually discerning.

Before discussing the scripture in question, it would be a good idea to get some background into the word and concept of repentance. The word, repent, or some form of the word is found most often in the New Testament, although its use can be found in the Old Testament also. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word, **nacham**, is the word used to mean, repent, and its implication is to be sorry, or to pity. In the New Testament it has a whole new connotation. It's been taught for years that repentance means an outward change of direction, and that is true in a limited sense. In actuality, the Greek word used to mean, repent, **metanoeo**, means to **think** differently, or to reconsider. Now it is true you have to think before you act, but the implication here is that you make a mental change first, thus the saying "*a change of heart.*" The Bible after all does point out that God searches the heart (mind), not necessarily the actions when someone repents. Remember, man looks at the outward and God sees inward.

"...for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

-1 Samuel 16:7-

Proverbs 21:2 says it this way:

"Every man's way is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts."

Also read what Jesus said to the Pharisees in Luke 16:15 and what David said of God in his Psalm 139:1-4.

My point in all this is that repentance progresses from a mental change that gradually manifests itself in an outward change; thereby we see "fruits" of repentance. For one thing, man in and of himself doesn't have the power to change himself. It takes the Holy Spirit working in a person's life, and the Holy Spirit will only begin that empowering in a person's life if that person has had a change of heart. It's been said

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before that the Holy Spirit is a perfect gentleman and He will not force His will on ours. On the other hand, whereas repentance is gradual, or at least the outward sign, forgiveness is immediate. For forgiveness one to another to be effective, man can't and shouldn't wait for its manifestation, again because man can't see the heart, only God can. As I stated before, forgiveness is not only an act of love toward those that offended or hurt us, but also an act of obedience toward our Father and Jesus. Jesus **commanded** us to forgive. That is why it is so important for man to understand unconditional agape love, because without that agape love man cannot forgive as he ought too.

"Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions."

-Proverbs 10:12-

Now that we have some background on repentance, we next need to understand the setting and context that led Jesus to speak these words in Luke 17:3. He had just arrived at Capernaum from Galilee with the twelve disciples. They had just paid the tax for the temple with the coins that Peter got from the fish he caught at Jesus command. Many disciples and children gathered around Jesus as they often did and He began a discourse on humility, which he demonstrated in several subjects. You will find the parallel, expanded version of Luke 17:1-4 in Matthew chapter 18.

Matthew 18 starts out in verses 1-6 demonstrating humility in childlike faith. In verse 7-14 Christ expresses His concern for the lost, as depicted by the child, someone who is trusting, open, and eager to learn. This woe in verse 7 is speaking to the world and the man of this world who would cause someone to stumble over the truth. Now in verse 15-20 Jesus speaks to us on proper procedure for a brother in the Lord who sins. Unlike the account of Luke who gives us one verse, Matthew goes into detail describing the proper steps to take. The outcome may appear the same, but there's a lot more involved. Each step taken is taken for one particular reason, to bring that brother back into fellowship with you and motivated by love. Now Jesus takes us further in verses 22-35. In verse 21 Peter takes it for granted that we are to forgive. The rabbi's taught that three times was sufficient, so Peter thought he was doing well when he asked if he should forgive seven times, but Jesus gave us all a principle when He told Peter to forgive seven times seventy. Remember also that this was a principle, not a literal commandment. In other words, we are to forgive as often as necessary. Jesus then began to clarify His answer to Peter with a parable and then concluded with these strong words found in Matthew 18:34-35:

"And his lord moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. So shall My heavenly Father also do to

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you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.”

Notice that Jesus did not say, “With this exception, or on the condition that he repent.”

When we were given the model for prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, commonly called, The Lord’s Prayer, we were taught to ask for forgiveness of sins as we forgive our debtors. Forgiveness is the only thing in the Lord’s prayer that Jesus chose to emphasize.

“For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”

-Matthew 6:14-15-

This is the type of forgiveness that affects our fellowship with one another. In the Gospel of Mark Jesus reiterates this at a different time than the time in Matthew.

“And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions. [“But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.”]

-Mark 11:25-26-

We must forgive one another from our hearts. That is what God looks at as we thoroughly covered earlier. God is not looking for us to mouth some secret formula that will do it all for us. He wants us to genuinely have forgiveness in our hearts. No malice must be allowed there, nor ill will. We must actually desire the welfare even of those who offended us.

“Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

-Romans 12:17-21-

It’s been said, that those who do not truly forgive their brother’s trespasses, have never truly repented of their own.

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"For judgement will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgement."

-James 2:13-

"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. And do not judge and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned."

-Luke 6:36-37-

"Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ."

-Galatians 6:1-2-

We are to restore each other in the spirit of gentleness. Again, here is that principle of bringing back a brother into the fellowship of believers, with gentleness and unconditional love. Remember what Paul said to the Romans about there being no condemnation if you are abiding in Christ (Romans 8:1).

Let's reason together for a moment. Let's look again in Luke 17:3 where Jesus said to, "**Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.**" But let's also look at Luke 23:34. Jesus was hanging on the cross and the soldiers were casting lots for His clothes. As He was hanging there, He was looking up to heaven and saying "Father forgive them for they don't know what they are doing." Luke did not write that Jesus said this, "Father please lead them to repentance so that I may forgive them." Of course not! Isn't Jesus to be our prime example? Of course He is! Does scripture contradict itself as so many in the world like to claim? I should say not! If Luke were the only Gospel account that we had then I would have to give some credence to the teaching that is creeping in, but the Lord gave us more to go on with the other Gospels as well as Epistles. In actuality, Luke supports Matthew in this account. We just need to use all the scripture and not just the ones that we want. 2 Timothy 3:16 starts out by saying that, "All Scripture is inspired by God...." (Emphasis mine). We need to use **all** the scripture.

Let's explore some more scriptures on forgiveness.

"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

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-Ephesians 4:31-32-

The word forgiving in this verse is the Greek word, **charizomai**, which means: freely give, grant as a favor, gratuitously (not expecting anything in return). This word is used in relation to our forgiving one another. It sounds real close to agape, unconditional love. The other word for forgiveness that is used in the context of God's forgiveness to man is the Greek word, **aphiemi**, which means to: omit, put away, remit, lay aside. So you see, that in relation to one another, we are to grant freely, as a favor, our forgiveness one to another. We are not God and we cannot remit sin, only God our Father can. We are to forgive freely with no thought as to any personal gratification.

Another use of the word charizomai is found in Colossians 3:12-15 where it says:

"And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful."

Isn't it amazing that verse 14 says beyond all these things, or as the King James version of the Bible says, "**above**" all these things? In other words, doing all that is listed in the previous verse as well as doing more by putting on love!

I would venture to go so far as to say, that anyone who wants to maintain a spirit of unforgiveness or wants to justify unforgiveness, is hurting, hurting deeply, and is possibly touched with a spirit of malice and very possibly harboring deep-seated bitterness. Remember Ephesians 4:31? We are to put all of these things away from us.

There is only one source that wants to destroy the unity of the body of Christ, and that is Satan. He is our enemy and will do anything to rob, kill and destroy God's handiwork. If he can get us to take offense and walk in a spirit of unforgiveness, then he wins. We can overcome the work of the enemy by walking in the Spirit as Galatians 5:25 challenges us to do. When we do this, we become victorious and overcomers of what Paul describes in Galatians 5:19-21.

Like so many other times in our Christian walk, we have come to a crossroads, a place of choices, with two options available to us. We can choose to try and adapt the scriptures to our present lifestyle or, we can rise above that and do what the Lord directs us to do in the scriptures.

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"Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; ..."

-Galatians 6:2-

Remember that the Law of Christ was straightforward and simple.

"'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. And a second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

-Matthew 22:37-40-

If we continue to call ourselves, Christian, and profess to the whole world, and each other that, yes, we do follow the teachings of Christ, then we have no room for **anything** that hinders us from demonstrating true God inspired love. When the enemy stands before God our Father and accuses us of being unloving people, Jesus Christ, our advocate can rightly say, "These are mine, they follow me and do as I say. Satan you have nothing on them!"

In closing I submit one of the most precious verses in the Word of God.

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and every one who loves is born of God and knows God."

-1 John 4:7-

WALKING IN PEACE AND SECURITY



With peace in his soul a man can face the most terrifying experiences. But without peace in his soul he cannot manage even as simple a task as writing a letter. -English psychiatrist

Nothing binds me to my Lord like a strong belief in his changeless love. -Spurgeon

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If you desire to experience the fullness of God's unfathomable love as one of His children, a study of one of the greatest Psalms, Psalm 23, will help you to understand the depth of the Lord's love in your life. It is not only an appreciation of the Father's love that you will walk away with, but a new sense of peace and security. When you know, I mean really know, and not just intellectually, but as it is revealed by the Spirit to your spirit, that you are being held securely in His arms; nothing can or will ever again be able to cause you to stagger.

As Christian's, we should always look to Christ Jesus as our supreme example. The apostles and disciples were great men who tried to pattern their lives after their Lord, Jesus Christ; we already know Jesus followed the example of the Father.

"Truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner."

-John 5:19-

All scripture from beginning to end, Genesis through Revelation, points to and reveals the character of our Messiah, our Redeemer and our Good Shepherd.

"You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me."

-John 5:39-

We *need* to understand the Scriptures, but not so much to know **about** Jesus, but rather to get to **know** Him, intimately. After all, history can tell us about Him and His life and the period in which He lived, but to search and meditate upon the Word is to commune with Him, for He **is** the Word.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

-John 1:1-2, 14-

The world, which we live in today, knows **of** Him; ask anyone on the street if they know of Jesus Christ, and most will tell you yes, but we

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are able to truly **know** Him, and be better for it.

A MATTER OF HISTORY

From the very beginning and all throughout scriptures we see prominent biblical figures cast in the roll of a shepherd. It is the most often mentioned occupation in the Bible, and it is evident that the shepherds had a very special place in God's heart.

Shepherding was very important to the way of life in ancient times. A shepherd often traveled long distances looking for water and green pasture. A shepherd had to not only feed the flock, but to protect it from wild animals as well. A shepherd could learn many lessons just by watching his flock and observing how they acted and behaved. It was no wonder that the Lord likens His children to sheep. Some shepherds had mixed flocks; that is, goats and sheep together. An interesting fact is that while sheep could be led, goats usually had to be herded or driven.

It is not so very surprising then to note that so many examples in Scripture, and so many types and shadows of Jesus and His followers, are identified with shepherds and their flocks. You only have to read the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and David to see the examples that God has so graciously set before us.

It is also no wonder that so many of the Old Testament prophets, even up to the time of Christ, used the illustration of a shepherd and his flock to get their messages across to the common people. Even their early history assumes that you understand the aspects of a shepherd's trade.

We, therefore, should not be surprised in understanding how Israel looked to their religious leaders as shepherds; especially since so many of their great, heroic leaders came from leading flocks of sheep. Even their expectations of a promised Messiah was likened so much to that of a shepherd.

God, as our Father, has always wanted to have a relationship with His children. He created man expressly for that purpose, but man through his sinfulness has lost sight of that primary reason. Man is likened to the sheep that has been lost, and at the very least to the sheep that has strayed. I firmly believe that is why the Old Testament is so rich with illustrations portraying shepherding. The blessings that we derive from these lessons are predominantly due to the fact that they all point to Christ as the perfect example of the Good Shepherd.

The Old Testament writers and prophets lived in expectation of the Promised Christ, the Great and Good Shepherd. We have the ability to

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live forth their expectations, because the Great and Good Shepherd has arrived! His promised coming has become a reality to us! With His arrival, and His lifestyle example set before us as the perfect pattern of living, we have the ability to see into the heart of God and realize in a very real and intimate way the depth of His love for us, as His children.

A MATTER OF HEART

A good portion of the Psalms was written by King David, himself risen from the occupation of a shepherd. In fact, when God instructed the Prophet Samuel to anoint a new King to replace Saul, David was even then tending his father's sheep. The Lord told Samuel, He was seeking a man "after His own *heart*" (Emphasis mine) 1 Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22. This was the man whom the Holy Spirit inspired to write the Psalm of the Good Shepherd, Psalm 23. What better person is there to write about the characteristics of a good shepherd than a good shepherd himself?

Psalm 23

1. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
2. He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside quiet waters.
3. He restores my soul;
He guides me in the path of righteousness for His name's sake.
4. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.
5. Thou dost prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; Thou hast anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows.
6. Surely goodness and loving kindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

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J.R. Littleproud wrote a short outline on this great Psalm which to this day is hard to improve upon:

- A. The secret of a happy life: every need supplied.
"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."
- B. The secret of a happy death: every fear removed.
"Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for You are with me."
- C. The secret of a happy eternity: every desire fulfilled.
"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.

Even though this is one of the most beloved Psalms and poems, it is not for everyone. Rather, this psalm refers to those who have made Christ, the Good Shepherd, their Lord, through a definite act of faith. We are only His sheep if we have personally accepted Him as **our** Good Shepherd.

"And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be delivered."

-Joel 2:32-

"That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.' For, 'Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.'"

-Romans 10:9-11, 13-

You can see how much this is a personal relationship; therefore, He is **my** Shepherd, **I** shall not want. Everything that follows this statement belongs to me; it is mine personally. My parents can't acquire it for me. My friends can't give it to me as a gift. I have to make the life-changing personal decision on my own, and you can see that it is not

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just a matter of saying something, I must believe it in my heart. We need to be very mindful that the God who searches the hearts knows our true heart condition.

Now notice the implication in the statement, I shall not want. **All** of my needs will be met. Notice it says needs. If I don't have all that I desire, either it is not God's time, or what I desire is not good, or it is harmful to me. The Shepherd knows what is good **and** necessary for the welfare of His sheep. His supply is based on His love for His sheep. Read Matthew 6:25-33. See how the Lord cares for what you need concerning food and drink as well as clothing. Verse 32 says that, "Your heavenly Father knows that you *need all these things*." (Emphasis mine). But notice verse 33, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and *all these things* shall be added to you." (Emphasis mine). What loving concern from our Good Shepherd, and all we have to do is to follow His leading into His Kingdom and into His righteousness. Notice also that your right to choose is not violated. You have every right to continue life as you know it or to pursue after His Kingdom and His righteousness. God will **never** take away your freedom to choose. Just remember though, that the rewards for following Him far outweigh the things you think you may possess now. When we follow Him, He promises, "*All these things will be added.*"

He makes me lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside quiet waters.

The Lord is concerned for our rest; most of the time much more so than we ourselves are. He makes or causes us to rest, to relax, to lie down. He makes provision and creates the atmosphere for us to rest in, if we are His and, He knows where all the green pastures are. My wife and I used to do a lot of camping in the past and every once in a while we would carry along our fishing poles. It didn't take long to learn where the best camp spots or fishing holes were, and when we needed to get away, we would always pick out the best spots that were available. The Lord does the same thing for us. He loves us so much that when He provides not only the time for rest, He also has the best "pastures" picked out. The pastures are not only a place of quiet rest spiritually and physically, but they also symbolize the best in nourishment. In other words, they symbolize our daily bread.

How often have we pursued some work for the Lord, only to find ourselves growing weary and tired? How often has the Holy Spirit, in those situations, led you to that place of refreshing and rest? He knows what is best for His children. We never lack because He

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supplies our needs and does so abundantly. When Christ said that He came to give life and that more abundantly, one of the aspects of an abundant lifestyle is the times of spiritual as well as physical refreshing that we get when we **do** rest in the Lord.

"Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers his way, because of the man who carries out wicked schemes. For evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord, they will inherit the land. The humble will inherit the land, and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity."

-Psalm 37:7, 9, 11-

God gives His children quiet and contentment in their minds no matter what condition that they find themselves in. He causes us to lie down. He **is** all-knowing and all-wise and only desires the best for us. The Apostle Paul said it best in his letter to the Philippians.

"I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need." "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

-Philippians 4:11-13-

That last scripture verse provides the key. Christ Jesus is our Good Shepherd; we get our strength, our refreshing, and our nourishment, all that makes us strong, from Him.

Our refreshing comes *"beside quiet waters."* Here is where we find pleasure and enjoyment. If you are a Christian, it is okay to have pleasure and to enjoy life. This attitude that a Christian should always be solemn doesn't even take into consideration that one of the "fruits of the Spirit" is joy itself. Spiritual joy, joy from God, our Father, with which we derive strength. Read Nehemiah 8:10, and see for yourself that what I'm saying is true.

The quiet waters, still waters, do not mean stagnant waters either, but rather the silent running waters that you would find giving life to a quiet pool, waters that are pure and invigorating. Have you ever noticed that to keep a small pool of water clean and pure, you need the running waters to enter the pool, but by the same token, the pool has to be giving out waters at the same time? When we allow the Holy Spirit to use us as His vessel, His "pool," we also will have *"Rivers of living water"* flowing from us, John 7:38. God's Word is like that, ever fresh, ever life giving. His Word is cleansing and again Paul makes his point well to the Ephesians.

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"Just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless."

-Ephesians 5: 25-27-

As sheep, we are not only refreshed but cleansed by the *"quiet waters."* Notice also that in the pastures we are made to lie down, but we are **led** to quiet waters. The psalmist says, *"He leads me."* We have to follow where He leads, and to effectively follow, our eyes must be on Him. We can rest assured that it is His love that motivates Him to lead us to what is suitable and beneficial. When our eyes are on Him, and not always on the turmoil around us, we are assured of that perfect place of rest and peace. When Jesus walked to the disciples on the water and Peter attempted to go to Him, he was successful until he got his eyes on the turmoil and crashing waves around him. When his eyes were on the Good Shepherd, he **was** walking toward Him (Matthew 14:25-31). Now take this one step further; when Peter cried out to Jesus to save him, how do you assume Peter got back in the boat? When our eyes are on the Master, we can be led through anything!

He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Have you lost sight of the green pastures, and the quiet waters? Jesus is the Good Shepherd and He will search unceasingly until you are found. Jesus once gave this example to the scribes and Pharisees.

"What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing."

-Luke 15: 4-5-

The Good Shepherd is a restorer. If God's children are hurting, if they have lost something once in their possession, it is He who brings it back into being. Just as the shepherd of old, lovingly tended an ailing lamb, so the Lord tends to those of His flocks who are ailing. He was lost but now he's found; he was sick but now he's whole. Precious are the promises to those who are willing to follow the Good Shepherd.

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The soul is said to be the seat of the emotions, as well as the mind and intellect. Do you lack peace, joy, or faith? These are fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). They are what satisfies the hunger of the soul. The Author of these can restore them to you; raise your eyes, look to the Good Shepherd, follow him as He leads you to restoration, and allow His arms to enfold you.

Again, we see His leading, His gentle guiding hand. Psalm 37 was also penned by King David, and in verse 23, David says:

"The steps of a good man are established by the Lord; and He delights in his way."

The word, established, in the original Hebrew, means, to prepare, to make right. In other words, God prepares and makes right every one of our steps, especially in the paths of righteousness, or right standing with Him. Psalm 66:9 says of the Lord that He is the One who keeps us and doesn't allow our feet to slip. In Psalm 37, the Hebrew word for delight means, to be pleased, to have favor. When a child of God follows the steps prepared by the Lord, God is pleased with them and they find favor with God. When you follow His leading, you truly are a favored child. Following the Lord takes faith to believe that where He leads is for your best, but the author of Hebrews says that there is no other possible way to please the Father (Hebrews 11:6). In other words, following where He leads faithfully is pleasing to Him. He leads us to a place of right standing before Him, *"for His name's sake!"* Jesus Christ leads you so that He may be glorified in all that you say and do, just as He glorified the Father in all that He said and did. If you claim to be a "Christian" and are doing something at His bidding, or at the very least, say you are, then what you do and how you do it, reflects on His name.

This reminds me of a certain adage a good friend of mine gave me a couple of years ago. I have it framed on my office wall and it says this, **"Religion says: I do the work, God accepts it, and I get the credit. But true Christianity says: God does the work, I accept it, and God gets the credit!"** Everyone who claims to be a Christian, whether practicing it or not follows one or the other of these categories. If we are truly His sheep, then He should definitely be getting the credit for what is accomplished, after all, who's leading who? When we stand before the throne of God, our Father, it will not be due to the things that we have done or our worthiness, but due to the unselfish devotion of Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd.

**Even though I walk through the valley of
the shadow of death, I fear no evil;**

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for Thou are with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.

Christ is a Shepherd who will always be at our side. We have no need to fear evil. Notice that the very word evil is the greater part of the devil; and Christ has defeated the devil, the author of evil.

“I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you; so that we may confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?’”

-Hebrews 13:5-6-

We can then personally say as David said, “even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, You are with me.” What deeper valley in the lives of mankind could there be but death? Death without hope is the end-all of humanity, and yet, notice that David is clear to say, “*the shadow of death.*” Death, to those that have a personal commitment to the Good Shepherd, is just what David calls it, a shadow. There is no sting in a shadow, so can be no harm. A scorpion’s shadow can’t sting you, and a rattlesnake’s shadow can’t bite you. The sting of death was taken away at the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. All that remains of death, to those that are in Christ, is shadow, and a shadow is all that is left of something after the light has shone upon it. When we die, we step from that shadow back into the light of Christ, and the shadow itself is just that, it has no effect on us.

What about the valley though, you might ask? The valley itself can be a dark place. We need to remember that when we enter that valley, we are not alone; Christ Himself will always be with us. Remember Hebrews 13:5, He said that He will never leave us nor forsake us. It’s in the valley nestled between the mountaintops, where the most fertile ground is.

I was born and originally raised in a valley area of the Pacific Northwest. The area that I came from is responsible for the majority of apple production for the nation. It is a very fruitful place. You can look to the mountains and the hills roundabout where I was raised and what you will see is barrenness. If you climb these mountains, as I many times did while growing up, you can look all around you at some awe-inspiring sights. But the production is below you, in the valley. The mountain tops are a good place for rest and reflection, and even to gain perspective, but it is in the valley where growth takes place.

The same holds true with our spiritual valleys and mountains. As we walk hand in hand with our Lord, allowing Him to lead and guide us,

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we find our strength and productivity. His rod and staff are our comfort. Why? His rod provides direction and discipline; it keeps us going in the direction that He is leading. If we start to stray, He can gently guide us back with the hook. Shepherds also use the rod and staff to keep a solid footing. We can take confidence in the assurance that we are safe, because there is none more sure-footed than our Good Shepherd. His rod keeps us going through the valley to the most fertile pastures and quiet running water. His rod keeps us from evil as we sometimes wander. Sometimes the same rod is used for our correction, but never in a harmful or hurtful way. It is always used to maintain direction and always handled with love and care for the flock. The rod is the Shepherds sign of discipline.

"All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

-Hebrews 12:11-

If you look around you at the condition that the world is in today, you will easily see that the *"peaceful fruit of righteousness"* is somewhat lacking. I guarantee you that if you do not believe in loving discipline, there is little peace in your home. We need to stand up for what is right and not allow the state or others the right to dictate to us what is contrary to scripture concerning **loving** discipline. It is obvious that our nation is worse off due to the lack of it.

The rod and staff are also our protection against the enemy. In the hands of an expert, the staff can be a deadly weapon, allowing the wielder a victorious finish. We do not need to be afraid when it is wielded by the loving hands of the Good Shepherd. We only need to rest in His presence, take comfort in His love, and be assured that He has only our welfare in mind. He leads us; all we have to do is follow Him. I sometimes wonder why those that call themselves Christians struggle so hard and have such a hard time when all He asks of us is to follow Him. Just look up and keep your eyes on the Leader. When we were children, we used to play a game called follow the leader and we always had fun; we could literally spend hours playing that game. When you're a Christian, it is no longer a game, but it really isn't any harder either. We make a choice to allow Christ Jesus to be our "leader" and we only do and say what He tells us too.

**Thou dost prepare a table before me in the
presence of my enemies; Thou hast
anointed my head with oil;**

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my cup overflows.

Look at this sentence that David wrote and think of the overwhelming confidence of the Shepherd that he is portraying. Remember, David used to be a shepherd. This is written by the one who as a shepherd boy, killed a lion and a bear with his bare hands to protect the sheep (1 Samuel 17:34-35). He is not describing a Shepherd that is fearful or hesitant. The enemies of the flock are out there, the Shepherd knows that they are all around. He knows that they are continually circling the pasture, they're watching from across the stream where the sheep are feeding and resting. Yet, in the midst of all this, the Shepherd is preparing a table in the midst of the sheep, in the presence of the sheep's enemies.

Now I want you to understand something; this Shepherd is not blind, uncaring or arrogant. He is very much aware of what is going on around Him and His flock, but He is confident and secure in His ability to protect His flock. Why prepare a table in their midst, though? *Because He loves the sheep.* He enjoys being around them and them being around Him. He knows that when they are in His presence they sense and know security. When He is near, they understand that they are where they should be. This Shepherd also knows how to rest in their presence; so they can take comfort in His presence. They would be able to sense uneasiness if the Shepherd was anxious, but this Shepherd radiates warmth and security. They have no need to worry. He sits down to a meal and probably talks with different ones; He knows how to commune with His flock. He knows they take comfort in the sound of His voice. He calls them by name, and they hear His voice and they come when He calls.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me."

-John 10:1-4, 14-

Psalms 23 verses 5 and 6 has stimulated a lot of commentary as well as some small controversy as to what these verses can mean; some of which strays from the context of the Good Shepherd and takes us into other areas of relationship with the Lord. But I feel this way; David was a shepherd; his heart was always seeking after the Lord, and he was a shepherd who had shown no fear while he was watching his father's flock. I believe David was correlating his experience with his

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father's sheep to the coming Messiah's relationship with the Heavenly Father's sheep. I believe David wrote under the inspiration and influence of the Holy Spirit, and that he didn't change the context in midstream. I still see Christ's role as a loving Shepherd in verses 5 and 6. We have no need to fear our enemies while we are in His presence.

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

-John 10:27-29-

We can rest in His confidence and authority. Psalm 37 goes hand in hand with Psalm 23:5. Read it over and over when you feel like the enemy is surrounding you. When he is, look for the presence of God waiting to commune with you while in the enemy's presence.

The next part of verse 5 is interesting; but when you view it in relation to the geography and customs of David's time, you will see just how fitting it is in regards to our relationship today with our Good Shepherd. *"He has anointed my head with oil."*

Now picture this; you have been led through the valley, which is lush and fertile, but which also has its thorns and brambles. Maybe you have strayed a bit and you have gotten yourself tangled in some thicket. You took your eyes off of the Shepherd for just a moment and finally realized you had lost sight of Him. One moment you're walking along safe and secure, the next you're caught up in the cares of the world. Sound familiar? The next moment you feel His rod gently tugging you back to the path that He is leading you down. You finally reach that quiet stream and those cool pastures. But you've been hurt and scratched; He calls to you and you rush to Him ready for His outstretched arms. He looks you over and notices the scratches and cuts that you picked up from straying. He gently takes you in His arms and anoints your head with oil, a healing balm. Immediately you feel the effect of the soothing oil.

It was common practice for shepherds to care for cuts and scratches, their own as well as the sheep, with oil; and why would the Good Shepherd be any different? The oil stands for anointing, and in the hands of Christ-the Anointed One, our spirit is invigorated, our body and our soul are refreshed, allowing peaceful communion, sheep to Shepherd. The overwhelming sense of His love floods our being and it's this feeling of love that lets us know what it means to be in the hands of the Good Shepherd.

"My cup overflows," as it always will in the hands of the One whose

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love is beyond our imagination or total comprehension. Yet, when you are held in His arms, and when you are thoroughly aware of His presence, the love that you feel flowing from Him is almost more that you can bear.

When you look back and reflect on all the blessings that being with the Good Shepherd provides, rest, refreshment, comfort, protection, peace, joy, anointing and health, etc., etc., surely you would agree with the Psalmist when he says, *"my cup overflows."* It is more than a person can contain within themselves, and just as love needs to be shared for it to actually be love, our cup of blessing needs to overflow to others.

How long has it been since you have truly reflected on the benefits of serving our Lord and Shepherd? Have you considered all that He has done and provided to you? Can you, like David, praise Him for what He offers to you? I am not talking about all the material blessings either, as important as they can be from time to time, but have you taken into account the many other *"treasures"* that you have been able to store up where *neither moth nor rust can destroy*, thanks totally to the loving care of the Good Shepherd?

We have gone through the valley, fruit has been produced, but for more fruit to be produced we need to spread the seed of that fruit around to others.

"By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."

-John 15:9-

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

-Galatians 5:22-23-

This is the fruit that needs to be produced. As your cup overflows, you need to let others benefit. A cup that is only filled and allowed to sit, stagnates; but a cup that is continually overflowing will always produce that which is life sustaining.

Surely goodness and loving kindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

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Psalm 25:10 states:

"All the paths of the Lord are loving kindness and truth---."

Since we have already established the fact that our paths are prepared and made right by the Lord, Psalm 37, and that as a Shepherd He leads and guides us, it only follows reason that goodness and loving kindness will be an attribute "*all the days of my life.*" Remember that the one who follows God's prepared paths has favor with Him already. Both these attributes usually refer to covenant benefits.

The rest of Psalm 25:10 says:

"To those who keep His covenant and His testimonies."

His covenant is the agreement that has been ratified by His shed blood for our sakes; the covenant is His promise to us, if, we accept Him. His testimony is the affirmation of His truth. We publically affirm the truth of all that He says and does, but we don't just do that by what we say but by how we apply those truths to our lifestyles. Christianity is not just a set of verbal beliefs, but a set of beliefs put into practice with the goal of changing our lives to become more like Christ. The power and authority behind what we say are only there if it is evident in our lifestyles first. Anybody can speak the words of life, but only a Spirit led life can walk the walk. Those that attain that lifestyle have goodness and loving kindness, as well as the other fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23.

"*And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*" The Hebrew word for forever implies: throughout the years. We have an eternal hope that after this life on earth is finished, we will inhabit our Father's house, where Jesus said are many mansions. But following the leading of the Good Shepherd has also allowed us access to the Lord's dwelling from the moment of our commitment on.

The Lord has set up His throne in an "*earthly temple not made with hands.*"

"Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are."

-1 Corinthians 3:16-17-

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The writer also exhorts his readers to:

"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

-Hebrews 4:16(NKJV)-

We can enter into the Father's presence at all times, boldly; the New American Standard says, "*with confidence*"; because He has established His presence in our hearts! David knew this when he wrote, "*And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*" David knew the Lord's holy temple would one day be in our hearts. I believe that is why God was looking for a "*man after His own heart*" (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22). What love, what peace and contentment, what joy to know that He is with me always and "*will never leave me nor forsake me.*" Proverbs 18:24 ends by saying:

"There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

What greater blessing could mankind ask for? The Good Shepherd abiding in us and us in Him. The only way that we as sheep could ever get lost, would be for us to take our eyes from off Him and not acknowledge His presence in our lives. Even then, as a Good Shepherd, we have this promise, He will always leave the others to go and seek out the one that was lost, until found (Luke 15:4).

A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE

Perspective is simply a matter of how a person views something based on their position in relation to what they are viewing. For example, if you were to look into the fall night sky from somewhere in Arizona, and you were to look toward the moon and just about the 5:00 position, you would see a brightly glowing star and nothing more. But, if you were to get a telescope and look at that same star, you would see that it is not a star at all, but in fact, you would see that it is a planet, the planet Venus. In this case what you saw and perceived was determined by your perspective. The telescopic lens actually brought the star into sharper perspective, and gave you a clearer insight.

King David had a view of the Lord as his Shepherd from the perspective of his own experience. He also lived in the time of the promise of the **coming** Messiah. In Hebrews 11, the great faith

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chapter of the Bible, the writer says in regards to the forefathers of faith:

“And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”

-Hebrews 11:39-40-

God has provided something far better for us.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

-John 3:16-

I know that this is probably the most well known, quoted scripture of all time, but I want you to look at a small word and just spend some time reflecting on it. The word is “so.” The third word in that sentence, a word that we hardly ever give thought too, and yet there is so very much packed into those two letters. God **so** loved. You could replace that little two-letter word with any number of demonstrative adjectives. For God greatly loved, for God unselfishly loved, for God longingly loved, for God magnificently loved, etc., etc.. There is absolutely no English word that adequately describes or expresses the depth of just how much love God has given to mankind. Try to think about just how greatly He loved in that act upon the cross. Our minds are not yet able to grasp the depth, but we do know it was **so** much!

1 John is one of my favorite epistles in the Bible and even though it is only five chapters long, it holds the essence of God’s love to man. John states it so beautifully:

“By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

-1 John 4:9-10-

We hear a lot about love today, and I preach and teach a lot about it, but the word has lost a lot of it’s original and true meaning due to the condition of the world in which we live and the way that the enemy has won in distorting it. Even in churches today, the word is tossed around with little understanding of its depth. Understand me, I am

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not condemning, but I am pointing out a fact that we often overlook, and I am saying that maybe we need to reflect on what true love is. True loving, **agape** style loving, takes effort. It means putting our selfish desires aside to care for someone else. It means what Paul writes in the Book of Romans.

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor.”

-Romans 12:10-

Many of us know a lot about love, we have head knowledge, I included, but sometimes the depth of practice eludes us. Look again to the epistle of 1 John chapter 4:

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. We love because He first loved us. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God, should love his brother also.”

-verses 7,8,11,16,18,19,21-

John isn't talking about something we feel, an emotion; he's talking about doing, an action; something that requires effort and willpower.

“Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.”

-1 John 3:18-

How do we learn to love like that? First remember Galatians, chapter 5:22 says that the fruit of the Spirit is *love*; well verse 16 says that we are to walk by the Spirit, and we won't carry out the desire of the *flesh*. Paul tells us in verses 19-21 what the desires of the flesh are, and most are based in selfishness, **love** of self. We walk in the Spirit by following the leading of Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd. We follow the paths that He is leading us down and we follow His examples.

“By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone

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who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

-1 John 3:10-11,16-17-

A MATTER OF CHANGE

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. All this talk about love, originates from Him, and He **is** the example of a Shepherd to us. In Him we receive all that David wrote about. He leads, we follow. If we follow where He leads us, as well as the example He has set before us, we can attain the same shepherd's heart attitude; and therein lies the goal of this whole teaching. We all need to have a shepherd's heart toward one another.

If you are a pastor of the "*flock of God*," you need to develop all the more, that heart attitude exemplified by Jesus and described by David. We need to be very wary that we do not do what the shepherds of Jeremiah's day did.

"'Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture!' declares the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel concerning the shepherds who are tending My people: 'You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not attended to them; behold I am about to attend to you for the evil of your deeds,' declares the Lord. 'Then I Myself shall gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and shall bring them back to their pasture; and they will be fruitful and multiply. I shall also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them; and they will not be afraid any longer, nor terrified, nor will any be missing,' declares the Lord."

-Jeremiah 23:1-4-

To you who are pastors, we live in a day and age when it is nothing to gather a small group of people to ourselves and call ourselves a church, but we need to take the calling seriously and realize, that the "*flock of God*" is just that, the flock of **GOD**. We are accountable to Him for all that happens to **His** sheep.

A shepherd's heart though, is not confined to just those of us who have a calling on our lives. David wrote, by the inspiration of the Spirit, to all who would read and do. Unlike David though, who had to look ahead to the promises, we live in a time of promise fulfilled. We

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have that, which to David was a promise, abiding **in** us. Our perspective therefore, is not one of experience only, or future promise, but one of fulfillment. The Good Shepherd abides **in** and **with** us always. The fact that He does live in us, should bring about some transforming change, not just to our way of thinking, but to our lifestyle also, which is controlled by our "heart" motive.

"Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

-2 Corinthians 5:17-

"I urge you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

-Romans 12:1-2-

The New King James Version states the end of verse one this way, "*which is your reasonable service.*" Our service, which is within reason, **is** a spiritual service, but this shows that God, our Father, is not asking anything unreasonable of us. Only what is best for us, and what proves to others, that which is perfect and acceptable.

Jesus Christ came to provide salvation where there was none. He came to lead us and show us how He wanted us to be. He is our prime and greatest example of how to live. We have a choice, His way or our way. His way, we just follow His leading and can take comfort in knowing that He won't lead us astray. Our way, we can continue to stumble and walk blindly along, with no comfort in sight. Jesus is still leading us by His Holy Spirit, through the valleys, to the green pastures and quiet waters, toward rest.

He is doing it for this purpose:

"Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ."

-Ephesians 4:13-

As I have studied Psalm 23 and how it relates to Jesus, the Good Shepherd, I have come to recognize areas of my life that still need transforming, and yet, I'm even more confident, that because Jesus still leads, hope will never be lost. My most fervent prayer is that we

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may all come to know Jesus in a greater way, and not just be satisfied with knowing about Him. I pray that our hearts will continually be transformed into that of a shepherd's heart, the heart of the Good Shepherd.

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WALKING IN VICTORY



The ability to be calm, confident, and decisive in crisis is not an inherited characteristic but is the direct result of how well the individual has prepared himself for the battle. -Nixon

He who would be a mover of the world must not be moved by the world. -Anonymous

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Let's face it. Adam did mankind a grave injustice. Yet, I wonder if any of us who have come after would have done any better? Think about it, man has a tendency to do exactly opposite of what he is told; when you tell man not to do something, he is going to turn right around and do it anyway.

Thank God, who loves us, that He allows us salvation by grace through faith, and not because of the things we do and don't do (Ephesians 2:8). Our nature hasn't changed since Adam's, and that has been clear all through history, from the very beginning until now. It is that very nature that causes such problems in our walking with the Lord. Remember that Adam walked in the garden every day with God. They had personal communion with each other, and yet, Adam still succumbed to temptation.

What I propose to show you in the next few pages is, number one, how to identify the enemy, and number two, show you what the scriptures say about overcoming the enemies we daily face. The key to continuing forward is in learning whom and what your enemy is, and the strategies that the enemy uses to cause us to stumble or fall. It is important also, as we go along, to be reminded of the precious promises of our Lord.

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand."

-Psalm37:23-24 (NKJV)-

The New American Standard says that when we fall, we won't be hurled headlong. We are going to fall. There is no question about that fact, but we can have confidence in the fact that we won't be down for the count, because Jesus Christ has a firm grasp on our hand. But, our steps have been ordered or established by the Lord. What a great promise! The best route, the fastest, most scenic, has already been prepared for us.

The Lord's established path is perfect, but in spite of that, there are many obstacles that are placed in our way with the intention of causing us to not only stumble, but to fall also. Many of these are self-made obstacles, but not all of them. Understand this though, the Lord does not place any obstacles for us to fall, for His pathways are perfect. The obstacles are placed in such a way though, that when I take my eyes away from the Lord, I will run headlong into them. As you can see, it all depends on where we are walking and where our eyes are. Thankfully, we serve a big enough God who guides us **and** keeps us from falling.

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"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy..."

-Jude 24-

If we are going to be successful at all in our Christian walk, we can't just stand on the promises of God, for we also have to be doing. A walk after all, is active, it requires doing something. Our walk, as we expressed earlier is a lifestyle and not just a name tag we tack on when we meet people. Therefore, it is important to also know who are enemies are so that we can avoid the pitfalls, and then we can confidently stand on God's promises. You may be thinking that I'm now going to talk about works and forget about faith, but I am not. There are things we have to do though. As James so eloquently said in his Epistle, faith without works is dead (James 2: 17).

We have three main enemies that I want to point out, and contrary to popular belief, the devil is not the cause of all of our troubles. He is, in truth, the root of them, but we have a tendency of actually giving him more credit than he deserves. I am not downplaying the seriousness of his actions, but there are also other things that cause us to stumble. Besides, if we aren't ridiculing or denying his existence, then we are laying all our woes on him. Jesus Christ wants us to rise above the myths and falsehoods and know the truth. If the devil can blind us though to that truth, then he has come a long way in slowing down our Christian walk.

As I have said, we have three main enemies and they are, the devil, the flesh, and the world. We will come to understand that our Father has not left His people defenseless though, but in fact has supplied us with the means to be overcomers in Him. If we can learn to recognize the threats from their sources, we can use what our Heavenly Father has provided for our victory and thus progress much farther toward being the people that the Lord desires us to be.

I want you to understand that this is not an exhortation on sin, but rather an attempt to bring to light the sources or causes of sin. As in many dealing with cause and effect, you can't do away with the one without touching on the other as well. Also, since the Bible places such strong emphasis on the devastation that sin produces, we can't ignore the causes and effects. This is not an attempt to accentuate our sin-consciousness either, for I believe we need to develop a heightened sense of Christ-consciousness to become the conquerors that our Lord desires us to become. When we are alert to our enemies, we can develop a walk that acts in obedience to the Holy Spirit and not in reaction to the onslaught of the enemy.

We do need to understand that Christ Jesus has won the war for us already. The victory is already ours through Him. The battles that we

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go through are creating in us a strength and a confidence that words alone could never accomplish. We are being trained as future kings and priests, and our training ground is the lives we live before God.

OUR ENEMIES

As stated previously, the devil is not the cause of all of our problems, but he is the root of them. Sin was not originally in Adam and Eve's nature, it came from an outside source and they are the ones that let it into their lives. They had within them the ability to not sin, just as they had within them the ability to sin. Satan, that "old serpent," was the vehicle for implementing sin into their lives.

"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust is conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death."

-James 1:13-15-

If you look at Genesis 3:6, you will see three areas in which Adam and Eve were tempted.

"When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate."

First, she was tempted in the flesh, for she *saw that the tree was good for food*, she saw it was good to eat, which enticed her physically, therefore it was **lust of the flesh**. It's been said that the eyes are the gateways of the soul; the soul is the seat of your mind and emotions. She was enticed in her soul through the **lust of the eyes**, for she saw *that it was a delight to the eyes*, in other words it was pleasing to look at. Then she surmised that it could *make one wise*, she succumbed to vain ambition, so she gave in to the **pride of life**. You might be asking, what is wrong with being made wise? The problem in this case is that the serpent was offering her another source of wisdom than the one in which she walked with every day. Godly wisdom is given freely to all who ask, and since her and Adam walked daily with God in the garden, it was freely available to her. Therefore, she presumed that she would get something **more** than what God could give her. She

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was not satisfied with the fulness of the life she had which was obvious due to the fact that she was even tempted for something different.

Even though, God the Father, had given them everything they could want, they were afraid they might still be missing something. In other words, they chose to believe Satan rather than God, their Creator and Father. These are the overshadowing elements that make up sin, even to this day. Adam and Eve chose to let these aspects rule their actions and motivate them away from God. In actuality, instead of their minds being made wise, their spiritual eyes were darkened. They had elevated their wills above God's, and they chose to disobey God's words. This is the basis of all sin today.

Once sin had entered the picture, our inheritance became corruption in the flesh, and we began walking in death, permanently separated from God until atonement could be made on our behalf. God created man to have fellowship with Him. Sin not only destroyed that fellowship, but it also destroyed our image or perception of God. Because of sin, man lost sight of the fact that our God is a loving Father. Then, our carnal nature gave rise to the world that organizes itself in direct opposition to God, and there you have it. A sequence of events was established that allowed the enemy to entice us with the very same temptations that led to Adam and Eve's fall. Satan only planted the seed; Adam and Eve watered that seed with their actions. As Christians, this is what we fight everyday, but praise God we are not left defenseless.

Just who is this devil who tempted man to the point of corruption with a single deed? If you read Ezekiel 28:11-19 and Isaiah 14:11-15, you will get somewhat of a idea of who Satan is. We have vague ideas as to how he came to be, but there is no denying the fact that he exists. If man has not denied his existence, he certainly tries to depict him in either ridiculous, or horrific ways; thanks to popular literature and movies, man has either become complacent or desensitized to his actual accomplishments. As 2 Corinthians 4:4 says, he truly is the god of this world.

"You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies."

-John 8:44-

That is how Jesus described Satan, the devil. In Matthew 13:19, Jesus calls him the evil one.

"The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might

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have life, and might have it abundantly.”

-John 10:10-

You can see in these scriptures that there is absolutely no redeeming characteristics to his nature or personality. There is nothing good found in him at all. Paul does tell us though that he can come disguised as an “angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14). Notice that this is a disguise; this is not to say that any part of him is good. He is still the great deceiver and imitator. We can see that he is very crafty and deceptive. Pride was most likely the cause of his downfall, for it is evident even today as his great tool and trademark. Read 1 Timothy 3:6 and Ezekiel 28:15, 17 to gain some further insight.

“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

-1 Peter 5:8-

Do you get the picture? Can you imagine him as someone prowling, under the cover of darkness, slinking around, eyes watching, waiting for a weakness to appear so that he can pounce and destroy?

We need to take to heart what Peter warned us about. When you consider the fact that he can disguise himself, and appear as an angel of light, someone who appears to be righteous, we need to be abiding in Jesus so we can discern the fact that “there is no truth in him” when he does come in disguise. We must be on our guard, we must remain sober. The scriptures always point us to the truth; the Holy Spirit will be faithful to give us discernment. The devil’s only motive is to rob and steal, kill and destroy, by any means necessary.

Satan’s kingdom is a kingdom of darkness, and as such he uses the darkness to blind the people of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4).

“I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.”

-John 14:30-

The last part of this scripture could also say, “he has nothing **on** Me.” Satan, the great accuser, could find no fault in Jesus. Jesus had passed the test of temptation and the devil couldn’t find anything to blame him for. Now, contrast that with what Paul said in Ephesians 2:2:

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"In which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience."

In other words, we were slaves to Satan; at least until we were set free from the bonds of slavery by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

As Peter stated, the devil is an adversary, therefore it is easy to see his work as recorded in Zechariah 3:1 as well as in the book of Job. Satan prides himself on accusing man before God and of accusing God before men. His most damaging work though, is that of tempter. He is continually soliciting mankind to sin. Satan tempts men at different times and in varied situations in their lives. He is expert at trying to tempt men in their weakest moments (Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 22:40-46). You know this yourself if you have ever spent days fasting and praying.

He also tempts man in times of sickness as evidenced in the Book of Job. Another area in which we can look for temptation to come is immediately after a great success, especially a spiritual success. Remember when the crown wanted to set Jesus up as king right after he fed them with the scant loaves and fish (John 6:1-15)? Jesus knew what was happening and so to escape the temptation, He departed from the multitude.

Pride is the enemy's most damaging weapon, due in part to the fact that it creeps in when you least expect it. Pride is the devil's calling card. If after doing something spectacular for people, especially if it has spiritual significance, you feel the pressure of pride rising within you, beware! Remember that the truth to any success is in the fact that we can do all things *through Christ* who strengthens us, and not of ourselves (Philippians 4:13). When we remember that truth, we can't help but keep the proper perspective.

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughtiness before a fall."

-Proverbs 16:18 (NLT)-

We need to take the devil's fall as an example of the destructive nature of pride.

Another example that we see in the Gospel account of Matthew 4:1-11, is that Satan is good at suggesting the use of right things in a wrong way, or vice-versa, the use of wrong ways to accomplish something right. How many of us, at one time or another, hasn't been tempted to cheat just a little to get the right results when trying to accomplish something important, especially if that something was a

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worthwhile cause? This is called, making the ends justify the means. Maybe you are aware of the fact that this is a very common practice, sadly even among some "Christians." We must be on guard, alert and sober. Remember that a half truth is still a lie, and Christ never did wrong to accomplish something worthwhile. Satan is wise, cunning, crafty, deceptive, proud, and strong, but he is *not* almighty! He is also not omnipresent. He cannot be at all places at the same time, as our Father God can be, so the devil cannot tempt you at all times. He has his helpers, his followers, and it is true that they are like him and do his bidding, but, they cannot *make* someone do anything against their will. That's why it was so important for Satan to plant the "seed" of sin; he can go about his business roaming the world stirring up havoc, seeking whom to devour, and man can still be tempted without him constantly present.

Which leads to a second enemy that Christians need to be aware of: the flesh. I'm not talking about the physical human body per se, but the old nature with its willingness to commit sin. The human body can provide some motivation, but it's the old nature that concerns us here.

"But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust."

-James 1:14-

The dictionary says that lust is a passionate desire. The Bible identifies it as a desire that originates from fleshly passions. James is telling us then, that our desires first entice us, which then leads to temptation.

"Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death."

-James 1:15-

It is only when we have submitted to the temptation, when we have acted upon it, that it becomes sin and thereby spiritual death. The temptation itself is not sin and it is not wrong. Only when we carry it further does it have destructive significance. The New Living Translation states these two verses this way:

"Temptation comes from the lure of our own evil desires. These evil desires lead to evil actions, and evil actions lead to death."

-James 1:14-15 (NLT)-

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Jesus told Nicodemus under the cover of darkness that, that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Holy Spirit is spiritual (John 3:6). Paul spoke to the Romans of the fleshly nature.

“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.”

-Romans 7:18-

Jeremiah the prophet posed this question:

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to do evil.”

-Jeremiah 13:23-

In other words, if you are used to doing evil, how can you hope to do anything good? To do evil is your very nature. Remember, sin was introduced by the devil, whom we discussed earlier.

Genesis and Ezekiel both depict the beginning of creation as very chaotic. Adam and Eve were also free moral agents who were not forced to sin, but rather, chose to sin of their own volition. Their sin arose when they allowed their flesh to have control over what they knew in their spirit to be wrong. The temptation did come from without, but they were in no way coerced, and from that time on their spirits took a back seat to their carnal natures and corruption was allowed into their lives where corruption was never meant to be. Thanks to them we inherited that very nature, and from that time on we became bound to sin, no longer free agents, but slaves.

You might be asking, just what is it about the flesh that is in such opposition to God? God created in us a will, an ability to make choices on our own without being forced. Man has taken that wonderful gift, and instead of freely loving his Creator as was intended, he has used it to oppose the plan of God. God has instilled in each of us the knowledge of Him as our Creator. He has made it evident in everything around us and yet we willfully ignore His presence. Even today, cultures that have apparently been isolated from so-called civilization, still seek outside of themselves for a presence that is greater than themselves.

“Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give

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thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools,....And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;...."

-Romans 1:19-22, 28-31-

Paul said it best. This was not what God had intended for His creation. With love, He created us, to love Him, but rather, we turned our backs on God and turned our lives over to sinful lusts.

"For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh...."

-Romans 8:5-

Also:

"Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."

-Ephesians 2:3-

People in opposition to God set their minds to be that way. They indulge themselves fully without any recognition of God. We were made in the likeness of God, but the corruption that was within was not what our Father intended for His children. Praise be to God that He made a way that we might be able to overcome this inherent nature and rise above it.

It is not pleasant to think about them, but it is important for us to recognize those attributes and qualities that He wants us to avoid. It allows us to realize where we have come from and the preciousness of the gift we have received. It also reminds us of what to be on the alert for in our everyday lives. His word is full of descriptions of the characteristics we need to avoid.

"Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

-Galatians 5:19-21-

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The word does not give examples of these things to make you feel shamed, or depressed, rather they are given that we might know what to be alert to in ourselves, as well as to show us the areas in our life where we might need help. These things come naturally to us and God wants us to be able to rise above these things. You need to also read the scriptures found in 2 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 3:3, 1 Peter 4:3, and 2 Peter 2:10.

We need to abstain or avoid the enticements of our carnal nature.

“Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul.”

-1 Peter 2:11-

“For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.”

-Galatians 5:17-

The flesh is one of the things that draws our eyes away from the direction that the Lord is leading us, and the very thing, if possible, that will cause us as Christians to stumble and fall.

“What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”

-James 4:1-3-

We are definitely at war and there is a lot at stake; the eternal wellbeing of all of our loved ones, the people we work with and all of creation in general.

Our third enemy is the world, but the world we refer to in this instance is not the material creation that our Heavenly Father made for us to enjoy. The created world is a gift from God and we are its stewards. As such, we need to keep a proper perspective concerning the pleasures and blessings that we derive from it.

“Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix

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their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.”

-1 Timothy 6:17-

The first part of Psalm 24:1 states:

“The earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains,

Psalm 50:12 ends saying:

“For the world is Mine, and all it contains.”

We also need to understand that after God created everything in the world, He looked upon His creation and saw that it was good (Genesis 1:31). The word that is used to describe our English word, good, in the original language means: best, better, great, complete. God did not find fault with His creation as He made it.

After Adam and Eve sinned, the ground was cursed and tainted, its beauty diminished and stained. The depth of this disaster hit home to me years ago as a young man. I was living in Washington state, where I was born and raised, and I visited Mount Rainier National Park with my bother-in-law. It was only the second or third time I had been there and we were visiting an area of the park in which I had never been before. We were standing on a bridge overlooking a huge gorge, with evergreens and firs blanketing the floor below us. As I looked into the mountainous distance, the word “breathless” took on a whole new meaning; it was so beautiful and awe inspiring that it literally took my breath away. My brother-in-law, who is now a pastor in Washington, said something I will probably never forget as long as I live. He said, “Remember that with all its breath-taking beauty, it is still marred by sin.”

The impact of that statement drove home to me the awful significance of man’s far reaching sin, and even to this day, many years later, I still want to weep in sorrow. What I had viewed, and the beauty I could see, was only a fraction of what God, our Father, truly meant for His children to enjoy.

“For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

-Romans 8:20-21-

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This material creation that God Almighty made for us to enjoy, is bound by the same corruption that has ensnared us, and its hope is our hope, its freedom will come when we are totally free.

When we speak of the world as our enemy then, we need to understand and remember that it is not the creation, but the system that man has established in the world, the system with its lusts and pleasures that are continually enticing men, that is enmity, or contrary to God. The world, through man has developed its own set of temptations and vices, and just as in everything else that man has put his hand to do, man has left God out of their equations. The very nature of our old self corrupts everything that it's applied too. The very thing that God created for man for his benefit is the very thing that man has tried to use *against* God.

God has never been pleased with any of His children conforming to the ways of the world. Read 1 Samuel 8:7-18, where the children of Israel wanted a king, just like other nations. They were in essence rejecting God as their king and leader. There is instance after instance in the Old Testament, as well as in the New Testament, that lets us know of God's displeasure with mankind's choices. Conformity to this world and its set of values indicates spiritual decline, rather than spiritual enlightenment.

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

-Romans 12:2-

We have to develop a new mind set, a new way of thinking when we belong to God.

"There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."

-Proverbs 14:12-

Jesus, Himself told the disciples:

"Don't store up treasures here on earth, where they can be eaten by moths and get rusty, and where thieves break in and steal." "No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." "And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul in the process? Is anything worth more than your soul?"

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-Matthew 6:19, 24, 16:26 (NLT)-

Jesus tried to point out to His disciples that just one soul is worth so much more than all of the world. If you set your sights on winning what the world has to offer, it is often at the expense of losing your soul. You may think you have won or gained something in the short run, but in the eternal scheme of things you will definitely come out the loser.

As Jesus expressed to His disciples, we cannot divide our loyalty, man does not have that ability, and, God does not want *anything* put before Him. He has commanded us not to put any gods before Him, and anything we value and esteem more than Him, becomes our god.

John wrote the following:

“Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever.”

-1 John 2:15-17-

Sounds familiar doesn't it? These are the very things that Adam and Eve succumbed too. John expressed it this way: the world is the realm of sin, therefore related to darkness. It excludes God, who is Light. The scriptures tell us that light cannot have fellowship with darkness (2 Corinthians 6:14). This should be the first reason for not loving the world. Secondly, the things of the world are: the lust of the flesh, or self-indulgence, or the cravings of sinful man. Also, the lust of the eyes, or covetousness. So much the world has to offer, comes to tempt us through our eyesight. Then, the pride of life, or the boasting about one's possessions, empty ambition and not recognizing the emptiness associated with the things of the world. These things do not come from our Heavenly Father, but from the world. The third reason for not loving the world, it's temporary. How foolish to put so much emphasis on what will pass away in due course. Even Job, who lived at about the time of the patriarchs, realized we come into the world naked and we leave the same way (Job 1:21).

“You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

-James 4:4-

This clearly leaves no room for compromise, not even a little. Mankind

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is divided into two factions, that which belongs to God and that which belongs to the world, or wickedness.

"For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things."

-Philippians 3:18-19-

Christians are of God, from God, for God and in God. The rest of the world is under the control of wickedness.

"We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."

-1 John 5:19-

"And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."

-Ephesians 2:1-3-

Paul is saying that we walked according to what the world gave us, by the authority of the devil. We were walking dead. The world system relates to darkness, and is steeped in darkness, which in turn appertains to sin, which brings forth death! The power and ability to function in death is due to our slavery to the prince of the power of the air, none other than Satan, himself! Men of this world are accustomed to doing his bidding. Our Father God, on the other hand, through His love for mankind, broke the chains of slavery that had us bound, through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. He equips us that we might remain free and thereby lead others to the same freedom!

OUR WEAPONS

God supplies us with the weapons of our warfare. I like how the King James version of the Bible states it:

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"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;"

-2 Corinthians 10:4-5 (KJV)-

Our weapons to defeat the onslaught and temptations of the world are not of the world, but divinely powerful through God.

"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world-our faith. And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"

-1 John 5:4-5-

The Father has always had a special relationship for this world. As stated earlier, this was His creation, created for a specific purpose. He made it principally for man's enjoyment, but somewhere along the way, man wanted it his way for his means, with God out of the picture. That never stopped the Father from still desiring His best for mankind, so now He tells those "who have an ear, to hear."

"If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."

-Colossians 3:1-2-

Our eyes must now be lifted above and beyond that which we see, to that which we know by faith.

"Now faith is the assurance (the confirmation, the title deed) of the things [we] hope for, being the proof of things [we] do not see *and* the conviction of their reality [faith perceiving as real fact what is not revealed to the senses]."

-Hebrews 11:1 (AMP)-

And also:

"And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."

-Hebrews 11:6-

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God has graciously given us a gift, a weapon, a tool, whereby we may use our "spiritual" eyes, to look beyond what this world has to offer. He has created a way in which we may also please Him; we can do it by using the very gift that He gives each of us. Think of how any one of us would feel if we were to give someone we love very much, a tool or instrument of exceptional value, one that would make their life so much easier, just to have them set it in a closet or on a shelf and never use it. That is what our Heavenly Father has done for us. He has freely given us something that is truly beyond compare, and He gives it in the hope that we will use it. Faith in a closet is not faith at all, for without faith we cannot and do not please Him.

"While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." "For we walk by faith, not by sight....."

-2 Corinthians 4:18, 5:7-

This means that the life we are living now is not the reality we seem to believe it is, it is but a shadow of what is real, the eternal. That which will be forever and ever is what reality is all about. When you look at it in that light, the situations and circumstances we find ourselves in are not all that important if they are not in the eternal scheme of things. And another thought, since Satan is defeated and will eventually be utterly destroyed, then he is not eternal either, so why allow his influence to effect our eternal well-being? When our eyes are looking beyond what we see around us, beyond that which will pass away, and focused on the eternal, that which God has for us, then we can no longer be tempted.

Faith comes from God, our Father, and He gives freely to all who will receive an allotment, to work with in the body of Christ, and faith increases the more we hear and accept the words of Christ (Romans 10:17, 12:3).

Faith is part of that body armor that the Lord gives to us, not just to protect us but to also use to see our way through the enemy's entrapments.

"Taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one."

-Ephesians 6:16-

A shield is mobile and can be used to guard most of our exposed parts. This shield can be used to protect our flesh and eyes. Our faith should also be something that grows so as to be more useful the more we

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follow after Christ. Read 2 Corinthians 10:15. The faith that God supplies us with, unlike a man-made shield, actually gets stronger and more effective the more we put it to use.

“Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.”

-1 Corinthians 16:13-

These words let us know that we are not playing games, but that the battles are real. We have to know what we believe and stand firm in that belief, alert, understanding that our enemy will try to trip us up and cause our downfall. A soldier should always be on his guard because you are not just protecting yourself, but also one another. We are to guard each other's backs. There is *always* strength in numbers. Remember the saying, a many stranded cord is not easily broken. That holds true in our Christian walk as well. Carrying our shield of faith should be a lifestyle, and not just something that we put on and take off like a change of clothes. The only way to remain alert is to be ready constantly.

Paul said that we are workers together for our joy when we stand firm in our faith, and also that the righteous man shall live by faith (2 Corinthians 1:24, Galatians 3:11). Unlike a soldier in the world who can be relieved for a spell, we are to be on our guard constantly. Our faith helps us to understand that our strength doesn't originate in ourselves but comes directly from Almighty God. Remember that we are fighting a spiritual battle, we are engaged in spiritual warfare. Paul reminds us that God's grace is sufficient for us and power is refined in weakness, and when we're weak is when strength comes to us, not ours, but God's (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Notice something else about this gift that God has given us; it is not only a defensive weapon, one used only for protection, but it can also be a weapon of offense. We can use it to keep our walk clear before us, because it also helps keep us from stumbling. As James so aptly wrote in his epistle, faith without any action is nothing in itself (James 2:26). Just as the attributes of love, mercy and compassion demand action to be realized, so also does faith.

Many of the spiritual attributes that we are striving to attain, demand some sort of action on the part of the believer. We must stand firm in our faith, in the knowledge of what God has said and promised in His word. Standing, believe it or not, is the act of doing something. You must make a conscious effort to remain steadfast, against the storms that come our way to shake us. Our firm standing is in the Rock, who is the Author and finisher of our faith, and while standing it draws us ever forward toward our goal in Christ.

Faith also provides us with the means, as Christians, to pursue the

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goal of snatching souls away from the enemy's camp, and winning them to the side of Christ. Now that is combative warfare!

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

-Galatians 5:22-23-

Of the nine attributes listed above, it's interesting to note their arrangement. Love, joy, and peace relate, first, to our relationship with God. Notice that love is the attribute that will always be first and foremost, for God *is* love (1 John 4:8, 16, 1 Corinthians 13:13). Patience, kindness and goodness, relate to our relationship with our fellow man. Faithfulness, or faith, gentleness and self-control are all relative to us as individuals. The word used here for faithfulness is the Greek word, **pistis**, which means a conviction of the truthfulness of God, assurance and belief. It is the same word that is used in the beloved passage of Hebrew 11:1 that describes faith.

Faith is an individual's attribute, it is something that we must all have personally to please God (Hebrews 11:6). My conviction is my personal belief in the truthfulness and trustworthiness of God. I cannot impress or force my conviction on you, but, you as an individual can also have the same conviction. Our Heavenly Father has seen fit to give to each of us individually a measure of faith. I can use the faith God has given me to follow after Christ, and at the same time, use it to *serve* my brothers and sisters. James 2:14-26 is an excellent passage on how faith should be manifested in our lives.

In 1 Corinthians 13:13, Paul says that faith abides. That word means that it is constant, secure, steadfast, and solid. It should be an encouragement to all of us, to see the things that God can accomplish in this world, through those that stand firm in their faith. Hebrews chapter eleven should be our living example and encouragement in God's truthfulness to those He loves. The fiery darts of the enemy: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, had no effect to those heroes of the faith that kept their shields held high. With this faith at our disposal, there is nothing that cannot be accomplished through God, our Father. In Luke 18:27, Jesus said that the things men considered impossible were not with God, and again in Matthew 19:26, he said that all things are possible to God.

Now, our motive should not be to just wage war, for without a cause a war is not beneficial, but our motive should be to please God and to give Him *our* love unconditionally.

"And those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if

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anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you."

-Romans 8: 8-11-

This scripture should let us realize that our situation is not as bleak as it first appeared, but rather, it shows that we do have a way to rise above our enemies. God does not leave His children, the ones He loves, in an adverse situation, but He always leaves a way for those who trust in Him to escape wrath (1 Corinthians 10:13). God also assures us that the temptations we do suffer are never more than what we could endure anyway.

"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts,"

-Romans 6:12-

The Lord has been so gracious as to give hints all through scripture that let us know we are really overcomers in Him. In this verse we see that we have the choice, to allow what we desire to reign or rule in our lives. Paul admonishes us not to let sin rule, but rather let Christ have reign in our lives. As Christians, we have a new master, a new nature, old things are gone!

"Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

-2 Corinthians 5:17-

Notice that it says the old things are passed away, they're dead! They are no longer alive in your life, and rather than leave an empty shell of a man, the Lord has given us something to replace the old, sinful, nature, the Spirit of Christ. Because of the Spirit of Christ now dwelling in me, I can accomplish things that I could never have hoped to accomplish by myself. This allows all of us to now obey the scriptures that tell us to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" (Romans 13:14).

A perfect example of obedience found in scripture is located in Acts 19:19. Today it would be the same. Can you imagine everyone in your community, bringing all their pornographic and hatred oriented materials to a public bonfire and saying, "good riddance?" What a thought!

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"For we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh."

-Philippians 3:3-

As you can see in this verse, it's not only important to put on the Lord Jesus and to worship Him, but we must go the next step also, by not putting our trust in our flesh any longer. As we have said before, we cannot serve two masters; we put our trust in Christ, then there is no room for trusting our flesh.

We've already established the fact that a Christian walk is an active one.

"Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written 'You shall be holy, for I am Holy.'"

-1 Peter 1:13-16-

This demands a very frontal attack. We are not only to resist the enemy, we are to submit to the Lord.

"Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God."

-1 Peter 4:1-2-

"And that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth."

-Ephesians 4:23-24-

So we see that when the old things have died, not only are all things created new in us, but they are made in the likeness of God. So, the new nature we put on is one of Holiness and Righteousness in God! We are now, in nature, back to the place that Adam and Eve left behind in the garden. We now can choose not to sin, without the bonds that once enslaved us. Adam and Eve's fall is and should continue to be an example to us.

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"Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved."

-1 Corinthians 10:6-

We can set our mind, and we can stand firm in confidence of who we are in Christ.

"And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints."

-Ephesians 6:17-18-

Our strength is in the Spirit. Without His help we are absolutely nothing, but with it, we are overcomers, victorious in all we do. The helmet of salvation covers our thoughts, and gives us assurance of Whose we are. When you know with all confidence exactly who it is who holds you in His hands, you can remain firm in your mind, a person who is stable in *all* their ways. Hebrews 4:12 states this:

"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the *thoughts and intentions* of the heart." (Italics mine)

The more that His word is in us, the more effective a weapon it is against our enemies. This sword is not only a most dynamic weapon, but in the hands of the Holy Spirit it is a wonderful tool that can cut away the unneeded things in our lives. In the Holy Spirit's hands it is an instrument that can destroy enemies, and also heal the Father's children.

As I stated earlier, we have been blessed with a most precious gift that is far beyond any worldly wealth. The Holy Spirit comes and takes up residence with us, empowering our spirit to take dominion over the cravings of the flesh. We still have our will, but now we can, by our own choosing, yield to the Holy Spirit within us, thereby allowing Him to accomplish *His* will through us. We can now "flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" as Paul instructed us to do (2 Timothy 2:22), and, we can accomplish this by following his command to walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16).

The secret to walking in the Spirit can be found in Romans 6:6-13. When you read it, notice that in the very beginning of the sixth verse

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says, "knowing." We *know* that our old sin nature was crucified with Christ on the cross, therefore, we are no longer slaves to the sin that held us. We *know* we are free men in Christ. Verse eleven is based on our reckoning, or better yet on our calculations of what has been presented to us this far, and then based on that *knowledge*, we act accordingly. Then, in verse thirteen, we are commanded to yield ourselves to God thus allowing Him to accomplish through the Holy Spirit the perfect work in us.

Our spiritual battle begins with us individually. We can only hope to win this battle with the help of the Holy Spirit. We can be a strength to one another in times of weakness only when we ourselves are operating in the strength of the Spirit, and as previously stated, we do need to be concerned about each other's burdens.

As Christians, it is a true saying that "we are in the world, but not of the world" (John 15:19).

"He was in the world, and world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him."

-John 1:10-

The light that Christ brought to this world is bright and real, but the world system does not want to recognize Him, or have any part of Him. Christ was in the world but not of it. His love for the world of man though is what motivated Him to come and suffer with us and eventually give His life for us (John 3:16-17, 1 John 4:9-10).

Jesus has told us that judgement is already upon the world and that the ruler of this world will be cast out (John 12:31, 16:11, 1 John 3:8). Satan, the devil, our adversary has already lost the fight. He just doesn't realize it yet, or if he does, he is not yet willing to admit defeat. That will change very soon for all of eternity. The very works that we war against in ourselves on a daily basis, the things that bound us in slavery, have been defeated and cast down.

The one thing that Satan cannot stand against is the truth of God's word. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He used the words of God. Remember that Jesus Himself *is* the word. He is the living word, it is just that the devil did not want to acknowledge it, yet Jesus withstood him with that very same word. That is the same weapon that we have at our disposal.

"If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."

-John 8:31-32, 36-

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It is His words that not only set us free, but also keep us free. But understand something, it is not just the knowing of His words that does it. Remember that the devil also quoted, although not fully, the scriptures as well. The key is in the *abiding* in His words. Allow these words of life to permeate your being, don't just quote them, live them. That is where the truth lies and that is where the freedom comes from! When we immerse ourselves in God's word, we can enjoy liberty.

"Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, stand firm."

-Ephesians 6:10-13-

We have armor we can use. As Christians, we are not left unprotected. When the temptations come, as they surely will, we can stand fast and not be swayed. The secret is to be wearing our armor continually. That's what Peter meant when he said to be on guard, to be sober. We are to take this battle seriously. Brothers and sisters *we are at war!* Do not let the enemy, by his lies and propaganda, make you believe otherwise. We must believe what God says. Satan cannot stand in the presence of truth.

"Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he *will* flee from you." (Italics mine)

-James 4:7-

The Lord's words are alive and powerful, and through our submission to Him first and foremost, we can accomplish His will in our lives. But the key is to submit first. Only then can we hope to resist the devil. Then we are not battling in our own strength, but in the Lord's strength. Jesus is to be our prime example, in every situation.

"He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the one who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him."

-John 7:18-

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The devil's kingdom as stated earlier is a realm of darkness, and his tactics are based in darkness, that is, keeping mankind blind to his ways. When we have the word of God in our hearts and we are abiding in it, we not only carry a light, but a beacon, and darkness must flee from the Lord's light. The psalmist said it well when he said that "the word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths" (Psalm 119:105).

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

-John 1:1-5-

Again, Adam and Eve were first tempted because they were led to believe that God was withholding something precious from them. The serpent told them that their eyes would be opened and they would see more and they chose to believe the lie. Instead of continuing in the Light that they walked with daily, their eyes were darkened. They had available to them everything that the Father had to offer and all they had to do was ask. If they were truly submitted to God, if they would have only called out and asked Him again, instead of relying upon themselves, that old serpent, the devil would have had to flee, because they would have resisted. Their example should be very clear to us.

"I love Thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies."

-Psalm 18:1-3-

The Word of God is our source and our strength, and as we allow it to dwell within us, and as we feast upon it day by day, our victory in the Lord will be continually manifested in our lives.

OUR VICTORY

"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world-our faith. And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"

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-1 John 5: 4-5-

"Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

-2 Peter 1:3-8-

God, as our Father, has the power and the desire to supply us with everything necessary for an abundant life, one of godliness and holiness, free from the lusts that have entrapped the world. Verse eight is in essence, telling us that as these qualities are ours and can and will increase in us, we will produce useful fruit, thereby becoming the vessels that the Lord desires us to be.

We've covered the fruit of the Spirit as described in Galatians already, but it is good to remember that the scriptures also tell us in that passage that when spiritual fruit is produced there we are not subject to the law (Galatians 5:23). The Holy Spirit seals, testifies, and confirms the work of grace in our souls by producing this fruit.

"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death."

-Romans 8:2-

As we should realize by now, our spiritual fight is a daily one; the Lord has not only provided the means to fight, but He has also empowered us to fight. This is a battle for lives, eternal lives, and not only our souls, but the souls of others as well. It should be a fight motivated by love for each other. It is, if there ever was one before, a freedom fight.

"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery." "Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

-Galatians 5:1, 2 Corinthians 3:17-

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The scriptures also state that we are servants of new covenant, not of the letter as in times past, but of the Spirit of Christ. The letter of the law kills, but the spirit of this new covenant gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6). This is our seal. It is the Spirit who gives us freedom *and* life. There is perfect freedom in the Lord, and we are no longer defeated, but rather, we have become victorious conquerors through Him. We are no longer dead as we once were, but now, we are evermore alive! It is the Spirit's good will to work in us and to produce the fruit of righteousness that He desires us all to have. We were once dead trees producing no fruit, but He has given us new life with the ability to bear all sorts of beneficial fruit.

I hope by now you can see that the dominion of the devil, so far as Christians are concerned, should have no effect on us. Satan's power has been neutralized and the power of darkness over us has been broken. The devil and all his tools and schemes, the world and all its enticements, the flesh and all its weaknesses have been defeated already.

"For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

-Romans 5:10-

"And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach."

-Colossians 1:21-22-

If you have ever reconciled your bank statement, you know that in essence what you are doing is balancing your account. That is exactly what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. We owed a debt and the books showed that mankind was in the red. But, with the sacrifice of Jesus, the Father counted it as a debt paid, and our spiritual "bank account" showed "paid in full", we became reconciled with the Father because the Son, paid our debt. We were brought back to the Father, re-establishing our relationship in friendship and love. Satan's power was thereby defeated, because what we owed him because of our sinfulness, the Son took care of. So, when the devil stands before Almighty God, accusing us, the Father looks at us through the blood of His Son, and all He sees are sons and daughters blameless and without reproach. We can now walk in the true knowledge of God's love. We can now walk as sons of God, just as Jesus Christ who is our example.

The accusations that the devil brings about us before God, are being dealt with on a daily basis, for our victory through Christ is permanent.

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Jesus Christ does not have to pay the debt for our sin any more, and furthermore, He is standing at the right hand of the Father, continually making intercession on our behalf. He bought us with a price and He will not give up on us.

One of the most powerful, and awesome scriptures that tell of His eternal love for us is found in the gospel of John.

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." (Italics mine)

-John 10:27-29-

We have so great an assurance that even when we do stumble and sin, our shortcomings will not forever condemn us as long as we continue to look to Jesus Christ as our advocate. He is our High Priest forever, and is always interceding for us. Paul said it so well when he stated that we are no longer condemned when we abide in Christ (Romans 8:1).

"Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need."

-Hebrews 4:16-

We can know in our hearts that we have nothing to fear of our Heavenly Father, and that with all confidence we can come before Him as He is seated on His throne. This is the picture of a loving, caring Father that the enemy does not want you to envision. If the enemy can blind you from this truth, you will be lost forever. But the Holy Spirit, who is constantly showing us the truth, is our guide. We can trust what He shows us, we can walk in what He reveals to us with all confidence.

We should be walking in victory for the very reason that we serve a God that preserves and keeps His children. We can echo the cry of the psalmist when he says that the Lord preserves the faithful and He doesn't forsake His godly ones. Oh love the Lord all you godly ones! (Psalm 31:23, 37:28).

The Apostle John shares with us that the Lord keeps us in many different ways. We are kept in the Father's name, we are kept in safety, kept in joyfulness, kept in purity, kept separated from the world, kept in the process of sanctification, kept in active service, kept in perfect unity and we are kept for the coming glory (John 17:11-24). Our Father knows just what it takes for His children to be perpetually

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walking in the victory that He supplies for us. The Lord is already doing and has done, all the work; all we have to do is step out and walk in the completed work.

Do you want to know the secret to always walking in Christ, in the path that He has established for us?

"My eyes are continually toward the Lord. To Thee I lift up my eyes, O Thou who are enthroned in the heavens!"

-Psalm 25:15, 123:1-

God has not chosen a weak, ineffective people, but a strong, vibrant and passionate one for His Son. God desires us to be an overcoming people, who, with Christ's Spirit dwelling in us, and we abiding in Him, are already walking in victory!

"But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

-Romans 8:37-39-

This tells us that no enemy, weapon, scheme, or device can take God's love away from His children. Let these scriptures take root and bury themselves deep inside your soul and spirit. These scriptures, these words of life, are positive affirmations of where we are, *now*, in Christ. Jude said it well in his closing benedictions:

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."

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WALKING IN UNITY



Prayer is the chief agency and activity whereby men align themselves with God's purpose. Prayer does not consist in battering the walls of heaven for personal benefits or the success of our plans. Rather it is the committing of ourselves for the carrying out of His purposes. It is a telephone call to headquarters for orders. It is not bending God's will to ours, but our will to God's. In prayer, we tap vast reservoirs of spiritual power whereby God can find fuller entrance into the hearts of men. -Oldham

There is nothing that makes us love a man so much as praying for him. -Law

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We can walk in love, peace and security, truth, forgiveness and yes even victory, but if the Body of Christ, we as Christians can't walk in unity, then we as a body are crippled, disabled. If we cannot find it within us to be as one, we will not be able to make heaven our home. Sounds hard doesn't it? It is and it should be. Christ did not draw us to Himself to be a fragmented, mutilated body. If we are His bride, He is coming back for us without spot or wrinkle. Do you think that it will be okay with Him, if we don't include the hands, or maybe the legs?

As I conclude this book with this chapter, it is with the hope that once we all have an understanding of *whom* we are in Christ Jesus, we can all be *one* in whom we are. This subject has been on my heart and mind now for years and as I have sought the Lord in prayer, I have asked Him, how in the world are we, a people who have such different views and such different interpretations of the scriptures, going to ever have oneness, or unity as described in the Bible?

I believe the Lord has shown me, and all I ask is that you try the spirit with which it is presented, search the scriptures for the truth of it and then search your own heart. Our eternal future depends on what happens within the next short while. In fact, the eternal future of many souls depends on what we do in the immediate future.

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to *preserve the unity of the Spirit* in the bond of peace. There is *one body* and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, *to the building up of the body of Christ*; until we all *attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God*, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by the waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, *we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head*, even Christ, *from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies*, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." (Italics mine)

-Ephesians 4:1-6, 11-16)-

Please, whatever you do, don't just glance over these verses. These verses hold the key to the foundation of our unity as **the body of**

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Christ! Note that it is in the Spirit, the Holy Spirit that we find unity. Did you catch that? It is our job to *preserve* it! It is the work of the fivefold ministry to equip us as saints for the work of what? Service! We have been called, all of us, to serve. We are to serve God, and we are to serve one another. There is one Lord, Jesus Christ and He and He alone is the head! The rest of us collectively are what comprises the body of Christ. He is the head, the brain, the wisdom, motivation, will, etc., that controls us. We move, or should move at His bidding.

What would you do today if your arms and hands started waving and thrashing about by themselves? I know what you would do. You would be at the doctor's office or emergency room so fast your head would spin. You would be demanding to find out why your limbs all of a sudden have a mind of their own. If that were to happen, you could bet that there was something wrong. A nerve signal, or a muscle contraction, or something, that would let you know, this is not right behavior, your body is not supposed to act like that.

Now think about how the Lord must feel when He considers us who call ourselves Christians, the *body* of Christ. Don't you think He is trying to get our attention to let us know that something is not right with His body? And our situation with the Lord is sometimes even worse. Picture for yourself, a leg in one direction, not attached to the body, maybe a hand lying somewhere else, trying to do its own thing. That is the picture you can derive from by the way we act in this world today. I'm Charismatic, I'm a Baptist, I'm an Evangelical, or Pentecostal, or Catholic, and on and on and on.

What does the word of God say?

"For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, *are one body, so also is Christ.* For by one Spirit we were baptized into *one body*, whether Jews or Greeks, (*Baptist, Catholic, Pentecostal, Lutheran*), whether slave or free, (*working, unemployed, housewife, working mother*), and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now *God has placed* the members, each one of them, in the body, just as *He desired.* But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." *Now we are Christ's body*, and individually members of it." (Italics mine)

-1 Corinthians 12:12-21, 27-

Notice that the scriptures assert that one part cannot say to the other

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part, "I have no need of you." We *are* Christ's body here on earth. When Jesus was here, He couldn't be everywhere at once. In fact, He had to go so that the Holy Spirit who can be everywhere at once, could come from the Father (John 15:26). The Holy Spirit indwells us so that we may do the work of Christ here on earth, and with the Spirit of Christ in each of us, there are no limits to where we can go to reach the lost. In that same verse mentioned above, Jesus also said that the Holy Spirit would bear the witness of Christ, or testify of Him. When we have that Spirit within us, we do the same thing. But, the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are one, they are not divided, and so neither should we be. We *need* each other, that is what the Father desires. It is God who has placed us in the body, and it is where. He desires us to be. He knows what is best for us, and for each other. Can there be any argument with that?

I hope this has laid the groundwork for the fact that we are one body, under Christ, the head. There should be no doubt as to that. Now since we all have our own callings, or jobs, as it were, we can understand to a degree, why we have so many denominations, but only up to a certain point. Where we have to draw the line, is with this point: when one denomination says that another is not necessary, they are doing just what God said we cannot do, "I have no need of you!" How then do we break down the walls of denomination, the doctrinal barriers that we have erected? We need to realize that the fences or walls we built up to supposedly protect us, have also penned us in. Now, how do we tear down those barriers and still maintain the diversity of the body? And how do we preserve the unity of the Spirit without seeming to compromise my beliefs? Remember, unity is in the Spirit of God, our job is to preserve it.

Have you ever stopped to look back on history and consider the circumstances that created a sense of unity within our nation or communities? I have, and especially recently. As I was praying for unity, and asking the Lord at the same time, how it can be accomplished, He started to show me some historical events that allowed division to cease and unity to commence. I realized that the events in question actually took place as far back as during the time of the biblical patriarchs. What am I talking about, you might ask? Warfare and conflict.

"And Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is too great to bear! Behold, Thou hast driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Thy face I shall be hidden, and I shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and it will come about that *whoever finds me will kill me.*"

-Genesis 4:13-14-

You might be asking yourself just how does this relate to unity. Cain

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cried out to the Lord and said, "whoever finds me," so even then it was obvious that people might come together to do him harm. Murder was unknown, but Cain opened the door to it, and because of the atrocity of such a thing, it had the potential to unite people against him, so much so that the Lord had to mark Cain so that no one would dare touch him. In the fourteenth chapter of Genesis we see wars taking place, soon after Lot and Abram departed from one another. You can see in these verses how different sides allied themselves with each other. This is just another form of unity. All throughout scripture, and all throughout known history, there have been wars and conflicts. Before mankind was created, as discussed in an earlier chapter, there was war in heaven between Lucifer and the heavenly hosts, and because of the devil's temptation in the Garden of Eden, division and conflict have been all mankind has known.

In America's history, there have been countless wars and conflicts and yet, during those times of war, America had some of the most prosperous times. The people came together with a united goal, to defeat the enemy no matter what. Neighbors who wouldn't speak to each other at any other time were united together for a common goal. The only thing that mattered was the protection of our country and the things that it stood for. Men and women of all races and ages will rally around a great cause, if something they value is potentially at risk.

Well, we as Christians should have the same feeling about our cause, and our cause is certainly much more marvelous than most of mankind can imagine. We are at war for the eternal deliverance of lost souls. This war was started when Adam and Eve fell from grace, and it has been going on since. The difference is, we have an assurance of victory to those who want to accept it. This is a war in which the outcome is already known, and there is definitely a winning side and a losing side. The winning side belongs to Christ, who won the victory already. The winners are all those who become a part of his *body*. But His body is not yet complete, there is still more growth that is needed and it is our job, as healthy parts of the body, to insure that we grow to "a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the *fulness* of Christ." We are not mature yet, because we are not full yet. There is still more to be added to the body of Christ! The losers, on the other hand are those who refuse or reject the offer of eternal salvation by being a part of Christ. He paid the price for it, so we have to be aligned with Him to accept the price He paid.

So now that we know we are at war, and the war involves the eternal well being of everyone we come into contact with, shouldn't we as Christians be united in that great cause? Shouldn't we be doing all we can to rally everyone that we know to come together so that we might be effective as soldiers in this war?

In the previous chapter we learned that our fight is not against flesh and blood, against man, in other words, but it is against spiritual

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wickedness in high places. This war is against the strongholds, the fortresses of the enemy. It is a spiritual enemy, demonic in nature and therefore cannot be waged with things of the flesh. How do you aim a rifle at a spirit? Even if you could harm one that way, how effective could it be against an evil nature? See, we are fighting evil attributes, evil natures or characteristics that lend themselves to tempt mankind. How do you fight that? How do you pull down a stronghold of witchcraft, or divination, or arrogance and pride, or hate and maliciousness? You can't attack the person who is influenced by it for the Bible says that they are blind to it and that they are slaves to those passions. Besides, the Lord does not want *anyone* to perish. It is His plan to give everyone a chance to choose His way.

There is one weapon and one weapon alone that will do damage to the spiritual forces of darkness at work in the world today. It is the one weapon that takes effort to use and yet the benefits are untold of. It takes some sacrifice, but is always used when motivated by love and concern for one's fellow man. Abraham used it as demonstrated in Genesis 18:23-32. David used it and was a man after God's own heart, and every mighty man of God that is listed in the word of God was practiced in it. And of course, Jesus was the prime example of it in action.

"The earnest (heartfelt, continued) prayer of a righteous man makes tremendous power available [dynamic in its working].

-James 5:16c (Amp)-

The King James version says that it is the effectual, fervent prayer that availeth much. To avail of something means to profit or benefit from it. This type of prayer accomplishes a lot. This type of prayer is passionate, and burning, and it is dynamic in its ability to get the Father's attention. It is intercessory prayer!

In all my studies of the Bible, this type of prayer is the most common form of prayer demonstrated by the examples given in the scriptures. From Job praying for his friends, and Abraham interceding for Lot in Sodom, to Jesus praying for the welfare of His future disciples, intercession is the one example demonstrated throughout biblical history.

Intercessory prayer goes way beyond petitioned prayer, for of all kinds of prayer, it demonstrates by its very action, a person's love for others. A man will not pray for someone he *chooses* not to love! Even people who do not consider themselves "religious" recognize the power of prayer.

Intercessory prayer is the one action that we as Christians can do that transcends denominational barriers; in other words, by its action, it

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can create unity. This is the one thing that all Christians believe in whether Baptist, Catholic, Charismatic, or Lutheran, etc. We all recognize the power and dynamics behind interceding for others, either for individuals or for a community as a whole.

"Pray, then, in this way: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen]"

-Matthew 6:9-13-

We all recognize this prayer. Most children can recite it. When you study it though, you will see some very interesting things. Remember that we are discussing unity. Jesus gave this as a model of prayer. It contains everything essential to a healthy prayer life, praise and adoration, petition, forgiveness. But let me stimulate your thinking for a second. Do you see intercession? What about, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven?" Think about it for a minute. What is the Father's will, right now at this time? You will find the answer if you read Jesus' prayer as recorded in John chapter seventeen. In particular I want to point out verse 21-22:

"That they may all be *one*; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; *that they may be one, just as We are one.*" (Italics mine)

This prayer is the best example of intercessory prayer. Jesus was praying to His Father, just as we are to do, and His concerns were for His disciples (Verse 9). Notice that His will for us is to be one, just as He and the Father are one. That is His will for us on earth, just as it is in Heaven. What is going on in Heaven, right now at this time? What is to be our example of the Oneness of the Father and the Son? After all, we are to be one as They are one.

"He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, not to appear in the presence of God for us."

-Hebrews 7:25, 9:24-

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Jesus Christ, *our* Lord, is continually in the presence of His Father, making *intercession* for us and all those who would follow after Him. If we are to be like Him, doesn't reason dictate that we are to be continually making intercession for one another, *and* for all those that would be drawn to Him? This is where unity comes in, the unity of the Spirit, the unity that we are commanded to preserve! If we are in Christ and His Spirit abides in us, the unity of the Holy Spirit is already there, we just have to do what we were supposed to be doing all along and preserve, or save it. We do that by being *one* in intercession for *all* of God's children everywhere, and, we pray on behalf of all those that are being called to be His children.

When we set our minds to pray like this, the love of the Father flows through us toward His creation and a dynamic is set in motion to work in the spiritual realm. When we begin to intercede, we attack, we come against, the scriptures say, pull down, the spiritual strongholds that are blinding men and women and holding them in bondage. When we come together as one, as the Father and Son are one, there is no mountain or obstacle, no power or spiritually dark high place that can stand against the force of this kind of prayer. Blind eyes are opened, deaf ears can hear, the spiritual dead are brought back to life in Jesus! Miracles haven't stopped taking place, we just need to open our eyes and recognize them for what they are. What greater miracle is there than a spiritually dead person that is brought back to a renewed life in the spirit and thereby rescued from *eternal* death?

The enemy does not want us to realize our potential in Christ this way. He will attempt to fight us and come against us with all he has when he sees that we are serious. That is why we *have* to be praying for one another! That is *real* love in action! That is love that is more than mere words. That is the kind of love that the Father wants us to display to one another. When the strongholds over our cities and nations start crumbling and falling down, that's when we will see real victory, that's when we will realize real unity.

Whatever name tag you go by, "I am of Paul, or I am of Apollos, or I am of John, or Luther, or Calvin, or White, etc.," remember that it is the Holy Spirit that draws us to God, the Father, through Jesus Christ, the Son (1 Corinthians 3:3-9). We are nothing without Him doing the work in our lives. As a church we need to get back to what God has called us to do, and one of those things is preserving the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3).

We as Christians need to recognize that even if we attend a church that is a little different in form or format than our own, we are still Christian brothers and sisters if Jesus Christ is our Master. We might take communion a little differently, or we might preach or teach in a certain style, but Jesus is still Lord. It is our relationship with the Father, through Jesus, that makes us brothers and sisters.

We can and should walk in love, and peace, and forgiveness, and

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power, and anointing, but above all these, our focus and attention should be on our Lord. When we can keep our sight on Him and the direction that His presence is moving, all these other things will manifest themselves in our lives. All these things, and much more will be accomplished in our lives when we truly walk in Christ.

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.”

-Ephesians 5: 1-2-

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born and raised in Yakima, Washington, Roland was born again at the age of 17. In 1984 he moved his family to Tucson, Arizona, where he became actively and professionally involved in ministry. Since that time, he has been involved in almost every aspect of ministry.

Currently he is the Pastor/founder of Oasis Bible Ministry, a ministry dedicated to outreach and teaching.

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ABOUT OASIS BIBLE MINISTRY

Oasis Bible Ministry is an outreach ministry with the goal of teaching the love of Jesus to a people thirsty and hungry for more of Jesus.

Our belief is based on 1 John 4:7:

**“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God;
and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.”**

Our motivation is derived from 1 Timothy 1:5:

**“But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart
and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”**

Our desire is to teach, publish and/or distribute the printed and/or recorded teachings of individuals for the purpose found in 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

**“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for
teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in**

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righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

Our further desire is that these works speak to the new man as described in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

"Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

It is furthermore our desire that these works attempt to accomplish Ephesians 4:12-16:

"For the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body, for the building up of itself in love."

If you have any needs or prayer requests, feel free to write us at the following address;

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